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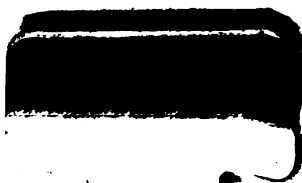
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Gleams of Scarlet



GERTRUDE AMELIA PROCTOR



GLEAMS of SCARLET

A TALE OF THE CANADIAN ROCKIES

BY

GERTRUDE AMELIA PROCTOR



BOSTON

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GLEAMS OF SCARLET

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CHAPTER I

Night was fast approaching, the twilight, with its opal tints, giving place to a begemmed heaven. The wheat fields gleamed under the young harvest moon, while here and there bright fires illumined the scene, being a sort of aftermath of the stubble.

For miles and miles the eyes of the traveler had viewed this expanse, treeless, flowerless, except for an occasional oasis of green where homes were located. The past two days had been a sort of wonderment to many, flying past those western homes. Now and then a little hand had waved them an informal welcome as the iron monster with its burden tore by before their always admiring eyes.

Suddenly the train began to slacken its speed, and soon the conductor informed his "people," as he good-naturedly called the Pullman guests, that they would have ten minutes to view the landscape o'er.

"Come, my little lady," exclaimed a well-modulated voice, as a brown clad figure stood at one of the Pullman drawing-room doors, "just time for a little ozone and a look at another huge bonfire before turning in."

"Oh, very well; but where is —"

"He's here; just coming to see if you cared to step out, for the air is very fine," returned a masculine voice.

Hastily donning wraps, the three tourists alighted, walking rapidly up and down the platform, watching the tongues leap from the stubble fire as it silhouetted against the sky. As the figures passed and repassed, the shorter of the three drew an arm through each of her companions', saying,

"Now I have two very good protectors — my staunch one for life, and my newly found acquaintance, a lady M.D."; for which the speaker received two simultaneous little squeezes.

"Pleasing little lady. But how about that son way back in Massachusetts; would you not rather he stood in my place? What say you, Mr. Raynor? Do you think your wife would exchange?"

"Well, Dr. Moulton, that is putting the question a little strong. Eh! Amelia?"

Just then a warning from the brakeman put a stop to any more banter, and they all hastened to reënter the Pullman. After a brief visit together, meanwhile watching the fires appear, then disappear, as they sped on into the night, the little party separated, the doctor reminding her new acquaintances to keep one eye open as they would pass a very gayly illumined western city toward morning, and the sweep of prairie land would be broken by the beginning of a chain of mountains which would indeed be wonderful to view by the morrow.

CHAPTER II

Old Sol had one ardent admirer at least when it rose in its full splendor upon the following day, for Amelia Raynor had watched for it even before she had seen the faint flush heralding its birth. She had been awakened by some commotion, and lifting her curtain, had peered out upon a scene of western activity — gay lights, and the bustle which attends the arrival of human freight.

From then on, sleep had refused to be wooed, and finding that it was really approaching morning, she determined to witness a sunrise above the mountains which were beginning to look very grim and stern as they were silhouetted against the early morning sky.

As a little time passed, the vapor appeared now and then between the ravines of the mountains, as if a veil were being lifted so that the soft shades of morning could scintillate through; until finally, as she again looked, she saw the deeper tints. Then, as the desert traveler watches until he sees his longed-for oasis, so Amelia Raynor gazed until little by little the full-orbed, light-giving wonder appeared over the rugged mountain range. Almost unconsciously she exclaimed,

“Horton — Horton! Wake up and see this glorious sight.”

"What is it?" came a deep voice from the resting place overhead, and soon another was looking upon the sight that had brought not only the ejaculation, but tears of gratitude to the eyes of the traveler that God had created such marvels as she had been permitted to look upon.

"Ah, Horton, God is indeed a God of love. And His name shall be called wonderful."

A little later the voice of the porter was heard, stating that their stopping place was just an hour away.

"Well, folks, hope you rested well," cheerily exclaimed Dr. Mouton as they met after hurried toilets. "I myself slept like a beaver, and, if you will believe me, I never even awakened until the porter bellowed out, causing me to jump nearly out of my berth. But, thank fortune, I collected my senses in time, making my exit in a respectable manner."

"Well, Dr. Moulton, I am the victor, then, for I not only saw your illumined western city, but a glorious sunrise," returned Mrs. Raynor.

Thus chatting, the trio reached the station. Alighting, they found a four-horse coach awaiting them. This was not all, for in majestic sublimity rose the snow-capped peaks, standing like honored sentinels, guarding the little hamlet which nestled at their base.

"This is indeed grand. What a wonderful world we live in! Dr. Moulton, how little one

knows of it until one leaves the home fire and becomes for a time a rolling-stone."

"You are right, Mr. Raynor. And that is why you see before you a lone female, for I will see something of my world. And as I have not been fortunate enough to find a companion, not even for a trip, you see I am doubly grateful to tag along with kind Mrs. and Mr. Raynor."

CHAPTER III

How delightful the frosty mountain air felt to the travelers, who had breathed so little ozone the past few days. As the horses swung into a fast pace for a few rods the breath was like new wine, bringing the color to the face and a sparkle to the eye. The streams were singing loudly their morning anthem, while the whole scene was one of appalling grandeur.

It soon proved to be a steady ascent, but the horses were faithful to their task, with the exception of the first nigh one, who had to be reminded by a touch from the long whip that he could not shirk. They had a very trusty friend, who shortly after the ride began insisted upon jumping from off his seat beside the driver, running and frisking thereafter the whole of the way — first on one side of his friends, then on the other. He was a fine, intelligent shepherd collie, so clean as to cause wonderment until the driver informed his passengers that his brother would be awaiting them at the door of the chalet. Surely enough, as they rose steadily to the height of five thousand feet, fifteen hundred being covered from the station, the first life to meet them was a facsimile of their guardian of the drive.

In another instant the driver, with a flourish of his long whip and a blast from the bugle, drove under the porte-cochère, face to face with a scene long to be remembered by all upon that mountain coach. Many exclamations of wonderment were made, some remaining silent, their eyes riveted to the sight, their lips refusing to utter what their hearts felt.

Three young Japanese porters who hastened forth to assist with the luggage, and the barking of the collies soon drew the guests' attention from the sublime to the practical, for a time at least.

As they were ushered into the large, hospitable room, Dr. Moulton noticed tears upon the lashes of Mrs. Raynor, and as they drew near to the blazing fire which snapped and leaped in unstinted cheer, Mrs. Raynor exclaimed as she sank into a seat,

"Horton, my husband, I expected to find a wonderful tinted lake and a stately glacier, but I have beheld a shrine."

CHAPTER IV

A delightful sense of satisfaction and comfort soon filled the tourists, as having entered the small, cosy anteroom, leading from the large dining-hall, they were greeted by the aroma from the generously filled coffee urn, which the young Jap, garbed in his spotless costume of white linen, had placed before them.

His face was very bright and cheery and his smile won hearts at once. Very deftly and quietly he arranged the accessories, making every movement count, until he seemed like a statue set to motion, so softly he moved about in his sandaled feet; while the golden beverage, together with the viands the lad served them, proved very palatable indeed.

After a little, Dr. Moulton turned to the lad, remarking, "These poppies are very lovely — they grow here I expect."

"Ah, yes — we pick them every morning," he returned, showing his white teeth in approved fashion.

"They are in such beautiful shades too," exclaimed Mrs. Raynor. "I noticed in the lounging-room they had large jardinières filled with them,

the same as here. Come, we must hasten out and view them."

Soon they were again out in the clear, life-giving morning air, standing at the very brink of the lake, which glowed like a huge opal as the sun's rays rested here and softened there its clear surface.

The beautiful glacier, which rose so majestically at the extreme back of the lake to the height of fourteen thousand feet and more, did indeed give the most sublime finish to the enchanting beauty of the scene.

It was no wonder Amelia Raynor had called it a shrine, for many mortals, whose busy, careless lives had in a measure drawn their thoughts from daily communion with their Creator, had paused, as if recalled to their duty, as their eyes had been lifted in silent adoration of their Father's potency. Not part of the year, but for all time, the peaks remained like pillars of purity, clothed in their spotless white, outlined at times regally in pure gold, as the sun's rays lingered lovingly there.

Having gazed in raptures until she could almost carry away the glorious picture — so stamped was it upon her mind's gallery, of none more beautiful — Mrs. Raynor was gently roused from her silent adoration by a glowing bit of color being held close to her face, and the voice of Dr. Moulton, announcing that she had not only found the poppy bed, but that she had been bidden to help herself.

"Come and see what a stunning border they make."

"I say, ladies, will you join me for a ride upon this rainbow lake," called Mr. Raynor, as he stood speaking with the boatman — a young Jap who was hustling about getting out the oars and cushions, jabbering at the same time:—"Very nice — very nice."

"Oh, yes, indeed, in just a few moments; we are upon an exploring expedition for a little time," laughingly called back Mrs. Raynor, as the doctor and she turned to visit the borderland of shaded, yellow poppies.

"Now this is fine. I would like to row myself, if there was a boat ready. I have not had an oar in my hands for a long time, hardly since my college days," remarked Dr. Moulton.

"Well, why not, Doctor? There is a mighty interesting chap just come into the boat house; a regular Westerner, a native of the place, I take it; as I have been speaking with him a bit. Let me see if he will not help out."

Instantly and before Elanore Moulton had time to say more, a young fellow of about twenty stood beside her. Touching his sombrero, he began at once fitting out the second dory, when all was ready and the first boat had pushed off with the Jap at the oar-locks.

Dr. Moulton, always ready to chat and glean any information, exclaimed, "Would you mind putting in another pair of oars and coming too? I have not rowed for a long time and may be very glad for a helper sooner or later."

"This is not my job, but I will give you a lift if you like," came the answer from the boyish voice as he deftly complied, and with a swift push they soon glided out upon the beautiful lake.

The doctor rowed well, each stroke sending the little craft well forward until they reached the side of the one rowed by the Jap, who was still glibbering in the most approved fashion. Soon both boats came to a narrow part of the lake, seemingly directly under the glacier.

"Oh, how beautiful it is," exclaimed Mrs. Raynor; "that little cove looks very tempting, I am sure. I would like to go a little farther, but, do you know, I feel a bit cool and perhaps I had best go back."

"Oh, I am sorry, but I would like to row a while longer — it seems like old times. Will see you at luncheon and tell you of all the wonders and beauties of my prolonged stay," returned Elanore Moulton.

"Oh, remain by all means, Doctor. I see you are enjoying it and the picture you make is a very pleasing one. Horton, have the boatman put me ashore, and I will take the path which looked so pretty back to the chalet."

"That is not a bad idea," returned Mr. Raynor. "I think a bit of a tramp would do us both good." Then, explaining to the young Jap that his wife felt cold, they made their landing — the young boatman being very happy at the liberal remuneration he had received; still "very sorry he could not row the Misses back," he kept repeating.

CHAPTER V

Dr. Moulton and her young guide were soon hidden from view by the little cove from the eyes of the two on shore. As the little boat turned into the narrow opening such a picture of repose and beauty met the glance of the lady at the oars, that she well nigh dropped them, her ecstasy being so great.

"Ah, my young friend, whoever you may be, I wonder, do you appreciate these nature scenes? Suppose you take a hand at the oars for a little and I will occupy the observation seat."

For a few moments there was silence between them, Elanore Moulton wishing the Raynors could see the glorious picture. Suddenly she was roused by the boyish voice saying, "I suppose we fellows about here do not care much about nature pictures, as you put it, but I have a sister who talks just as you do. I guess it is like women folks."

"Ah! indeed, and has she seen this beautiful cove?" asked his companion.

"Oh, yes, Sis goes everywhere — she is quite an explorer. I get worried over her sometimes, but she only laughs and tells me she can look after herself and me too."

"Good. And how aged is this sis of yours, may I ask?"

"Just turned eighteen, and as good a chum as ever lived. But I say, Doc," continued the boatman, "I like you. I liked you as soon as you took the oars into your hands. I saw you knew what you were about."

A smile had crept into the eyes of his companion at his brief manner of addressing her, and now at the conclusion of his remarks she laughed good humoredly. "Well, that is pleasant news. My name is Moulton and I am from Pennsylvania. Kindly tell me yours."

"Very good, Doc. I have a handle to my name also; not quite so fine as yours, but it is good enough for me. It is Windy Anderson, though my real name is Alfred."

A peal of laughter rang forth from Dr. Moulton's lips at this information.

"Well, by which name do you prefer to be called?"

"Well, I think Windy sounds more sociable-like." At which they both laughed.

"Very good — and now, Windy, my new friend, tell me something of your life here, for I take it from what you have said that you are quite familiar with this part of the globe. Where do you live?"

"Oh, about eight miles back off the main trail — lived there about six years. You see, Sis and me are all there is left — gets pretty lonesome for Sis sometimes — I know — but she keeps busy. So

do I, for that matter. I can't begin to tell you how many times I've climbed the trail up yonder this summer."

"Trail — what trail?" asked his companion, gazing into the boyish face, whose expression of sudden sorrow, as he spoke of his sis, had given place to one of lively interest as he spoke of the trail.

"Well, you see, Doc, that is partly where my income hails from. I am a guide — I show the guests at the chalet where the chain of lakes lies — for there are more than this one. We all ride the ponies up the mountain. Say, Doc, I wish you would go."

"Well, well, Windy, you are quite a lad to be sure — perhaps I will — who knows. How far is it?"

This time it was Windy's laugh that echoed forth from the lovely chasm, through which the boat was slowly gliding.

"Oh, not so very far," he returned, as soon as his gayety had subsided. "But straight, straight as a die. Have you ever ridden horseback?" he continued.

"No — that is one of the sports I never tried — but I have always wanted to. Mrs. Raynor, the lady who was in the other boat, has been wishing she might, and has been speaking about it for the last few days. She has ridden quite a bit in days gone by, and if she hears of the trail she will surely want to make the ascent."

"Then you will too, won't you, Doc? And I will get you a dandy pony; his name is Spotty. He is as careful as an old maid. Oh! I mean — old lady," while the color mounted to his brow as he hastened to change his expression of speech.

Elanore Moulton at a glance took in his dilemma, but her sense of fun got the better of her, as she repeated, "Old maid or old lady — which do you think would really be the safer, Windy?"

"Oh, I know you could have been married a heap of times, if you'd wanted to — so the old maid did not mean you, Doctor Moulton," Windy hastened to explain, although his color was still far deeper than was its usual tint.

How his companion did laugh — she laughed until the tears came into her eyes. Then she exclaimed, "Well, how do you know but I am married?"

"I — I did not see any ring — but that funny green stoned one upon your little finger, so —"

"Oh, Windy, you are incorrigible — but never mind, you guessed right; and now, what's more, I will go up the trail with you. You see I can, as I have no other half to consult."

CHAPTER VI

"And so your titled young guide has promised to bring all the necessary accessories for the climb up the trail, providing you can persuade us to make the ascent. Well, what do you say, Amelia? Shall we accept and allow Dr. Moulton to have her protégé here in the early morning?"

"Oh, yes, Horton, that would please me more than anything I could conceive of," returned Mrs. Raynor. "But oh, my dears,"—and here she flashed a bright smile from Dr. Moulton to her husband—"I am sure I shall have to be strapped upon my pony, for as neither of you have ever sat a horse before, and you, Doctor, have to ride astride, as the young guide has advised, I shall be chief witness to the blanched cheeks and dilated eyes of you both, and shall be so convulsed with laughter that I shall need to be well mounted."

"Well I like that—what say you, Mr. Raynor?" exclaimed Dr. Moulton, as she helped herself to another after-dinner mint. "If the morning's venture is half as nice as this table d'hôte dinner has been, it will be worth the attempt. Do you not say so?"

"I certainly do, and did you ever see a more artistic setting to a dining-room?—while these

Jap waiters are certainly ideal. I would like to have one to take East with me. As to Mrs. Raynor's laughing her sides sore, we may have a chance to retaliate when we see her in one of Windy's don't-fits, instead of outfits," returned Mr. Raynor, sending a glance of admiration to the charmingly gowned figure of his wife. "Now, suppose we adjourn to the office and see if we have any mail — it seems as if we are quite a step from our son and friends in Massachusetts."

"Don't say son, Mr. Raynor, until after our lark to-morrow, as I am afraid your dear little wife will not carry out her comedy act with much zest if you bring up too forcibly that lad of hers back in the States — eh, dearie?" said Elanore Moulton, linking her arm within that of her lady companion, and together they left the well-appointed room.

"Do you know, Doctor, I have been thinking quite a bit about this lad Alfred, and particularly his sister. Did you learn her name?" asked Mrs. Raynor. "She and my Robert are about the same age; fancy my lad living alone in such a wilderness, for if their home is eight miles from civilization it can be little better. Then both their parents being dead, it seems to me an unusually sad affair."

"Yes, I too have had that incorrigible youth in my own thoughts, most of the time, since I first looked into his bright eyes; and do you know, Mrs. Raynor, the lad seems to have a very good education, notwithstanding his slangy, pert remarks.

We must question him more closely to-morrow and learn of his plans for his sister and himself."

Later in the evening the acquaintances bade each other good night, promising to meet for an early breakfast, so that they could make a fresh start on their much-anticipated mountain climb.

After reaching her room, Elanore Moulton busied herself for a little time in arranging her belongings; then turning out her light she raised her shade for a view of the glorious picture she knew was waiting for her vision. Yes, there in the almost awful stillness of the perfect, early autumn night, gleaming white and spectral, stood the glacier, appearing taller and more stately than ever, while the lake seemed to have beckoned the turrets from their stern repose to mingle in its depths, such was the reflection.

Beautiful as it was, it sent an almost unconscious shiver through Dr. Moulton, as she gazed and gazed upon its almost unrivaled beauty. Suddenly upon the still air she caught a sound, then another, and ere many moments had elapsed she beheld a lone equestrian galloping toward the chalet. Nearer and nearer he came, until his passing under the porte-cochère hid him from her view. She was about to return her gaze again to the sublime picture, when a rap sounded at her door. Turning from the window she called, "Come," thinking it must be the maid, when who should confront her but Windy Anderson.

"Good evening, Doc. Glad you are in. I

brought the needed — they will be sent to your rooms soon. Would like to have brought them up here myself, but Miss Young, at the desk, attends to all that."

"Well, well, Windy, thank you; but come in for a little and we will have a chat. Did you just come down the road upon your pony?"

"Yes, but how did you know?" asked the lad, as he stepped into the room, and took the seat which was proffered him.

"Ah, ha, I am a mind-reader you see — so look out for me."

"Well, I should say; but, Doc, you will look real swell to-morrow, for I have brought you my fringed leather jacket, and with the sombrero you will be all O.K. I was so glad when the message came, saying you were going, for you will have a day's fun you will never forget."

"Now look here, my young friend, your words sound altogether too much like Mrs. Raynor's. She, with tears in her eyes, from laughter at her husband's and my expense, is anticipating much merriment to-morrow, and the fun you speak of will likely be yours also at the expense of our grotesqueness."

"Oh, now, Doc — I did not —" At which Dr. Moulton's pretended gravity disappeared, as she laughingly reassured her caller that she knew he was sincere.

"And now, Windy, tell me of your home back in the wilds, for I am deeply interested in you and

your sis, as you call her. By the way, what is her name? I forgot to ask you yesterday."

"Her name is Roma, but we always have called her Sister, or Sis. You see, I gave her the name of Sister when she was a wee mite, for she is younger than I, and as I could not say Roma plainly I got in the way of saying Sister, and then as we grew older, it became Sis."

"Roma; oh, what a pretty name, and it has such a musical sound!" exclaimed Dr. Moulton; "but, Windy, how did you ever come by your *nom de plume*."

"Well, it was like this — Father had been a bookkeeper for many years, but his health began to fail and so he and Mother talked it over and decided to take a homestead, hoping that by the time it was cleared, Father would be his old self again; but he only lived just two years. I tell you, it was pretty tough upon Mother then."

Windy gained a larger portion of his companion's liking than could have come to him in many ordinary chats by the audible choking and the sudden dashing away of the mist that rose and trembled upon the boyish lashes.

"Then it was up to Mother — with me to fill in the gap, which I tried to do, but Mother just could not stand such a strain and she lived only a few months after our homestead was legally ours."

"Oh, Windy, I am very sorry — you have, indeed, shouldered a heavy burden for one so young. But how did you manage to pay for your neces-

sities? Did your father leave any money?" inquired Dr. Moulton.

"No, Father did not have very much when we left our home in the East, for we came from Massachusetts, and then it took all for his illness; but, of course, we gained the right to our home as we had then lived there more than half of the required time. Father had hired some of the natives to help him build our house, which is very comfortable, and you would call it unique. It is of logs, of course, but they are nearly hidden from view by ivy. I believe Mother used to call it Boston Ivy; at any rate an old neighbor sent her some plants which she set out and it was Roma's and her delight to nurse and make them grow, until now they have even partly covered the field stones that Father used, here and there as he put in a chimney, and also a few stones round the windows to sort of take the place of sashes. There are also a couple of posts at the end of our piazza — for we have one, Doc, even if we do live in the wilds — and from it we see glorious sunsets which Roma loves so well."

"I just want to see your Roma, for I feel she must be quite an unusual girl," interrupted Windy's companion. "Will you take me to see her some day after I have learned to stick on to a pony?"

"That I will — and I will show you a fireplace that is one, for that is the foremost attraction of our 'Snugey.' So now you see, Doc, that is why I have been guiding parties up the trail to view

the chain of lakes you will visit to-morrow — so that I might earn a little filthy lucre to keep the larder filled. That is also why I gained the title of 'Windy,' for I made it a point of entertaining my parties, so that I might take a larger mite home. On account of my being so newsy the other guides began to call me Windy, and I have been called so ever since. I must skip along now, for Sis will be waiting up for me and it is getting late. So good night, Doc. I will be on hand in the morning."

Rising, he turned to leave the room, but Dr. Moulton detained him by crossing over to his side and putting her hand upon his shoulder, while with an unusual degree of kindness, she said:

"Good night, my young friend. Thank you for your kindness in coming here. Give your sister my best wishes and tell her I shall make it in my way to see her very soon."

CHAPTER VII

The next morning Dr. Moulton was astir very early, for there were some letters she felt she must send by the day's mail, and as they had planned on a rather lengthy climb she thought best to have business before pleasure. She had drawn her table near the window, and every now and then she would pause and gaze upon the wondrous picture gleaming bright as a morning star amid its surroundings. She had been putting the picture on paper, by sending the details to the widowed mother she had left in the home so dear to them both in the East. Nor did she leave out the description of Windy, her young friend. She wanted to speak of the ride she was looking forward to so eagerly, but, fearing it might cause her mother anxiety, she refrained; but as her eyes rested on the really artistic jacket and sombrero, she added this postscript,

Never mind, Mother, I shall have among my collection some kodak mementos, which will not only be good for the blues, but may show you your daughter as a very daring tourist. And now I must go and have my breakfast for I am as hungry as an early riser should be.

Upon meeting the Raynors, she related to them the very pleasant call she had received the previous evening after leaving them. Also that her desire to see the "Sis," as the lad called the girl Roma, was very great.

"Can we not plan to see her to-morrow? You see, Mr. Raynor, you and I will have gotten our sea legs on by that time and will be all ready for another voyage. And now I will meet you both very shortly. The side porch is where Windy informed me he would be with the ponies. Have you your sporting blood up, Mr. Raynor? I will gather mine together, ere I again see you. We know our little lady here will only have to spend her energy in suppressing that abundance of jollity she expects to have such excess of in beholding our antics — Eh, my dear?"

Here Elanore Moulton gave her companion a friendly little pat and turned to leave. Amelia Raynor, however, detained her, exclaiming that she thought it would be a very good idea to take along an anesthetic, "For, if when about to make the descent, Horton or yourself should find your courage had taken wings, you could still be brought to the depths below, even though in an unconscious state."

"There she goes again, Doctor, poking fun at poor we, us and co. But we must hurry now or our friend Windy will get impatient," laughed Horton Raynor.

Just as the tall clock that stood in the recess of

the inner hall chimed the half after seven, Elanore Moulton appeared, transformed into a veritable Western cowboy. Very natty, indeed, she looked, attired in Windy's fringed jacket, while the sombrero was highly becoming. The divided skirt secretly caused her some annoyance, but she felt that she must be a thorough sport, so acted accordingly. As she stepped out upon the porch under the porte-cochère, she found Mr. and Mrs. Raynor already there, both looking very smart and their faces full of much merriment.

"So, ho, my lady mountaineer, you are charming and most punctual!" exclaimed Amelia Raynor, "But, my dear, I am sorry that I have a little disappointment I must acquaint you with."

"Where is Windy? Who is that lad with the ponies? Are we to have two guides?" suddenly inquired Dr. Moulton, as the lad drew nearer the steps, leading the ponies.

"That is my news," returned Mrs. Raynor. "Windy sent this guide to tell us that he was never so sorry about anything in his life as that he could not go with us this morning, but that it was such a swell morning he advised us to go. He also said he would see us later and explain how it had happened."

"Oh, I am sorry, for Windy was so pleased when he gained our acquiescence — but, never mind; it is, as he says, a swell morning, and we have a game of excelsior before us."

The new guide seemed a first-rate sort of fellow,

whose name was Joe, and as Dr. Moulton had insisted upon mounting first, as she wished Mrs. Raynor by, as well as the guide, she straightway made the acquaintance of the rather meek-looking animal into whose keeping she was about to relinquish herself. With much laughing and a goodly amount of chatting, she soon found herself sitting very straight and tall upon the back of Spotty, her four-footed friend.

Mrs. Raynor was the next to find her seat upon a very pretty bay pony, Dolly by name. It seemed just a bit awkward to her at first to find her feet both encased, but being so used to the saddle she soon became accustomed to it.

Mr. Raynor had a roan, named Polly, which fell to his lot, and he mounted with much fun at his own expense.

Soon the trio were out under the blue dome of heaven and had turned their ponies' heads to follow Joe and his rather spirited animal, which he called Scotty. He had hastened ahead of his party, after seeing that they were properly arranged. Past the beautiful lake they took their way, Dr. Moulton and Mrs. Raynor riding side by side, while Mr. Raynor followed as their body-guard.

Soon the chalet was left in the dim background, while almost from the start the trail proved a steady ascent. How beautiful everything looked in the fresh newness of the early morning! The woods, as they entered them, seemed so silent, as

if the awakening of the new day had not as yet been manifested. A delicate aroma greeted them from the pines that stood tall and spectral upon either side.

"Ah, my dear Mrs. Raynor, is it not good just to be alive upon such a morning as this — not to mention sitting a fiery steed, as straight as a brigand?" called forth Elanore Moulton, for the little party were now riding single breasted up the rather steep incline.

"It is indeed, and I would give a good deal for your picture which I mean to snap before our ride is o'er," gayly returned her companion.

"I can tell you one thing; it is not the last ride I shall take, for just to breathe this scented air would make me almost willing to risk breaking any one's camera," answered Dr. Moulton.

Slowly and with certainty in their every step, the ponies bore their burdens up — up — always up; stopping ever and anon to rest or to snatch a morsel from some leafy twig that came temptingly near. Now and then the chattering of a squirrel or the scampering through the underbrush of some little mountain rabbit, would cause the ponies to sniff the air as if bidding their forest friends a cheery good morning.

"I say, Doctor," called the cheery voice of Mr. Raynor, "are you going to walk, ride or roll down this mountain trail? I have begun to grow gray, just contemplating the thought of how in thunder I am to reconnoiter."

How the woods resounded with laughter at this outburst from the aide-de-coup! Even Scotty, the leader of the little band, laid his ears back as if to take in the cheeriness which vibrated throughout the air.

"Well, as to the descent, I cannot answer you, Mr. Raynor. What I was thinking just now was that I did not wish to reach the top, for it is so beautiful here — Why, it is like a crystal maze, and when we reach the top we must descend and then our fun will be upon the decline."

"I say, Joe," continued Dr. Moulton, as she called to the guide who was some little higher up the path, "how much longer are we to be permitted the excitement of this climb?"

"For about one-half hour I should say, miss, and then you will see a picture you will never forget. The twin lakes are seven thousand five hundred feet above the sea, and you will have climbed two thousand feet. Not bad for a first one, miss."

"No, not bad; but I wonder if Spotty here, good creature, knew how my heart beat the first half hour, and only for the beauty of the woods he might have beaten a hasty retreat and without a rider."

As they advanced toward the top of the trail the light, which glinted in some times in patches, then again in floods of sunlight, converted the scene into a perfect bower of bright, dainty freshness and serene loveliness, until one felt that to be a

veritable child of nature was to be the envy of all God's creatures.

Windy was right. Dr. Moulton uttered to herself, "I have enjoyed this ride, hugely, but the lad himself — I am sorry he could not have been my guide; but then I shall see both him and that sis of his before I go back to my busy life again." Just here her soliloquy was interrupted by Joe remarking that they would see the gigantic Beehive Mountain in a few minutes that separated the lakes, and that now very soon they would be at the top.

Sure enough, after another few deep pants upon the part of the ponies — for it seemed even steeper just here than at any other part of the ascent — the little party realized that Excelsior would be proclaimed. Joe had already dismounted and was tying Scotty to a tree, meanwhile calling to the trio that he would soon help them, as they would have to walk a little way if they wished to view the second lake.

"Well, well, here we are, to be sure!" exclaimed Mr. Raynor, as Polly appeared upon the wide clearing which the other sure-footed creatures with their riders had gained, and were waiting to be released from their burdens, "I tell you, Doctor, these ponies are very faithful, and it would not be a bad idea for many of the human family to profit by their example."

Here they began to climb the steep pass of some two hundred feet, to where the twin lakes lay concealed.

They were very busy chatting, when their rather labored breathing permitted, when all at once Elanore Moulton happened to glance to the extreme height of the climb and there her gaze rested upon a picture such as an artist would have made himself immortal by, could he have converted it to canvas as she beheld it.

"Oh!" came from her parted lips, in such an awed tone that Mrs. Raynor, who was directly behind her, felt that something had befallen her friend, and only when she too had gazed up to the place where Elanore Moulton's eyes seemed riveted, did she understand.

CHAPTER VIII

For a moment both Dr. Moulton and Amelia Raynor felt that they must be witnesses to an apparition, so silent did the figure appear. The picture which had drawn the ejaculation from Elanore Moulton had been a slight girlish one, garbed in a simple dress of brown homespun, while at the slender throat was knotted a kerchief of scarlet. The wind had blown the soft brown hair over her shoulder until one could scarcely tell where hair and dress met, save from a patch of scarlet which held the braid of wavy hair and lent the bit of color to the scene; while a face, in which suppressed amusement vied with curiosity, looked down upon them as she stood in the doorway of a most unusual-looking abode.

Several years previous there had been built at the summit of the trail a shelter for tourists. It had proved a haven from storm, and also a place to retire when the rather difficult climb by foot had been completed, which was necessary, after leaving the ponies, in order to view the second lake.

This the slip of a girl, standing there with her gray eyes riveted upon the little party, had been a witness to. She little realized the charm her appearance presented to the two ladies, who reluc-

tantly withdrew their eyes from the attractive picture to resume the short climb that would bring them to her side.

"Well, of all things! who can that child be?" softly questioned Amelia Raynor of her friend.

"I will soon tell you," was the subdued answer from Dr. Moulton, who with a last gigantic stride had finished her task and now stood with eyes once more looking upon the young stranger. Elanore Moulton, in the few minutes which elapsed for her to reach the side of the girl, had been conscious of a magnetic personality, and when she heard her own voice saying, "Roma," and felt the soft clasp of a little brown hand in hers, it seemed to her only perfectly natural that this child should be there waiting to greet her.

"And this is the lady that Broth has told me of — and whom he thinks is right nice. He could not come to-day, so all of a sudden I took it into my head that I would beat him out and here I am," exclaimed the girl, showing a great degree of animation as she thought of the surprise it would be to that brother when he should learn of it.

"Yes, Roma, my child," returned Dr. Moulton, "this is your brother's friend and I hope yours also. I have been most anxious to see you, for Windy has spoken so much of you. Mrs. Raynor, this is Roma, the Sis of our friend Windy. I knew it the moment my eyes rested upon her, partly from her brother's description and partly from premonition."

Mrs. Raynor here took the girlish hand into her own as Elanore Moulton reluctantly released it, and drawing the child closely to her, said, "I also am very glad to know you, Roma. I have a son many miles from here whom I have not seen for several weeks, and I think you must be about the same age."

"I am nearly eighteen. Brother says he is to give me something fine this year, for it is a birthday a girl should not forget. Do you think he is right?" Roma asked, as she allowed Mrs. Raynor to embrace her.

"I tell you that brother of yours is quite a chap, Roma, if I am any judge of lads. But here comes Mr. Raynor and Joe," exclaimed Dr. Moulton.

"Oh, was your guide Joe?" Roma asked. "I am glad; he is 'most my brother too. I did not know who was to show you the trail. I would have liked to, but was afraid Broth would not let me, so did not ask him, but just got a start ahead of you, and well — here I am."

The words were scarcely finished when Mr. Raynor joined them, and Roma was presented to him. Meanwhile, Joe had stood a little back of the group, but never once did his large dark eyes leave the face of the girl who stood there, the center of all, in her simple naïve attractiveness. Elanore Moulton, wishing to speak with the guide, turned to step toward him, when she intuitively turned again from her project for the light which radi-

ated from his glance, as it fell absorbed on the girl, was one which she felt had best remain undisturbed, at least by her.

By the time Roma had turned to greet Joe, which she soon did in her sweet frank way, every trace of the look which had rested there so recently had vanished. He simply remarked that he had not expected to see her again until evening, although he noticed all the way up the trail fresh foot-prints, but had not thought she was before him.

"That was funny, Joe; funny you did not hear Gypsy's whinney, for she made that queer little one of hers, several times, on the ascent, and now I must go for her," Roma exclaimed as she started to turn from the little circle.

"Why, where is she, Roma?" Joe asked. "I shall fetch her. Is she in that little clearing you like so well, under the clump of pines?"

"Yes, Joe, but how well you remember. It is a long time since Broth, you, and I rested there together. I should have thought you would have forgotten all about it before this. But, thank you, if you will bring her, for I want to ride back with you all," returned the girl.

To Dr. Moulton, who could not but overhear the conversation, there was but added proof in the little dialogue to confirm the glance she had seen from Joe that unconscious love, deep and true and not of a brotherly nature, was his for the girl Roma.

"And now, folkses, I want your pictures, singly

and collectively," announced Mrs. Raynor, as she began to perch her head first on one side then on the other, planning for the poses. "Doctor, we would feel that half of our climb up the trail had been thrown away if we did not have Roma's picture to take home with us, would we not?"

"Oh, yes, that we would; and, Roma dear, would you mind standing again in the doorway of the 'Refuge,' as you call it, so we may have your own self just as we first saw you?" asked Dr. Moulton.

"All right — I will; but when Joe fetches Gypsy you must take her picture, for she is my own beauty; and is like my second self, as she shares much of my time, and fun," exclaimed Roma, as she hastened to comply with the wish for her photograph.

Gypsy proved to be all that her mistress had said of her — a beauty of the buckskin type, of a perfect cream, while her mane and tail, which were white, were full and long. A real circus horse, Joe used to call her, until one day he had been very forcibly informed by Roma that she was nothing of the sort, and that she did not wish to have her called such, for Gypsy had too much dignity for a pony of that calling. From that day she had been Gypsy, nothing else, as far as Joe had been concerned.

"And now, Roma, that we have viewed the twin lakes, I think you had best lead our procession when we descend the trail, letting the Doctor here follow, while Joe and Mrs. Raynor keep an eye

upon me; for if I am going to retreat other than upon shank's mare, I feel I must need a double bodyguard," seriously exclaimed Mr. Raynor.

With much merriment the party picked their way back to where the ponies were waiting them, Joe having led the buckskin for Roma, and now they were all mounted once more and ready for the return to the chalet.

If Roma had been a picture worth remembering when looking forth upon nature from the door of the "shelter," she was equally such when sitting in her graceful, natural attitude upon the back of her beloved Gypsy, who seemed to feel so proud when bearing her slight body, while she shook her mane ever and anon in the most approved fashion. It was the simplest thing in the world for Roma to ride side-saddle even down the trail, which she did much of the way. At the start, Dr. Moulton had shown faint traces of nervousness, which Roma had been keen enough to detect, though with much tactfulness she had refrained from saying so; simply remarking, as she saw how tightly the Doctor grasped Spotty's bridle, that, "It is so wonderful, but the ponies never make a misstep if you let them feel their own way."

"Well, you little witch," Elanore Moulton returned, "you are surely Windy's Sis, and thank you for giving me a hint in such a charming manner."

A little later, as she felt more secure in her saddle, she learned much of the life and likings of

her young companion. Learned of the depth of her love for the only brother, and that he was almost her only relative. That of girls and their way she simply knew nothing, for, with the exception of her mother, she had scarcely spoken with other than men or lads since leaving her home in the East. She was but a simple child of nature, and what wonder of her love for the woods and mountains — had they not been her companions, her confidant, her almost all? In them she had recognized God's greatness and beauty — a blessing, indeed, they had been to the lonely child.

When nearing the last half of the trail, Roma gave a shout of delight and in a twinkling sprang from her saddle. With a sudden movement, extending her hand a trifle from the path which had been worn by the constant plodding of the ponies, she brought forth and held to Dr. Moulton's astonished gaze a circlet of gold, while the light as it fell upon it was not brighter than her eyes, as she exclaimed, "Oh, it is a perfect beauty of a ring. Who do you suppose lost it?"

"Well, Roma child, how in this world did you see it away from the path where it lay — and how nicely it fits," returned her companion, for the girl had instantly put it on her finger and was now gazing in admiration at it. "It is what is called a signet ring, dear, and here are the initials A. E. P. in the form of a monogram."

"Oh, dear, I am sorry it has that upon it, for if I should not find the one who lost it — and I do

so hope I won't — it will seem all the time as if it were really and truly some one else's when I want to believe it is all mine. You see, I never had a ring before. Mother had one but it was left upon her finger,"— here a shadow fell athwart the young face, reminding Elanore Moulton of a similar one she had seen upon the brother's. "But I hear the others coming, so we must move along," continued Roma, as she hastened to her seat in the saddle. "Please do not say anything about my finding it, Dr. Moulton, as I would like to surprise both Broth and Joe," suddenly Roma broke out.

"No, indeed, I will not mention anything relative to it — and I —"

But here Roma's voice interrupted her saying, "I only mean for to-night, for, of course, you or Brother must inquire at the chalet if any one has lost one. I will put it into my handkerchief and to-night I will put it on when I am getting the boys' supper."

How bright the girl's face appeared all the rest of the homeward way and what an expressive face hers was! Dr. Moulton felt that she would like that girlish, animated, little creature always beside her, for she had already found a deal to admire in Windy's Sis.

And when a little later she, together with Mr. and Mrs. Raynor, urged Roma to come in and take tea with them, she admired her still more; for, after thanking them, Roma added, "Not to-night,

for what would my two boys do without their cook? ”

Promising to ride down with Windy the next day however, she bade them good-by — telling Mr. Raynor she thought he had acted first rate. Joe and she then giving the reins to their ponies, were soon lost to view as they started for their home, up another trail, in the opposite direction from the chalet.

CHAPTER IX

"And so this is the place your father and my uncle hove to, is it, when he so unceremoniously left the East for parts unknown?" The speaker was a short thick-set lad of some years the senior of Windy Anderson, to whom he addressed his question.

"Yes, Father brought his family here some years ago. It did not look then much as it does to-day — for I can tell you there has been much hard work put in since those days."

"H'm — then it was hard work which killed your father, eh? I thought like as not it was worry." Here the speaker seated himself in one of the very chairs the dead man's hands had fashioned from pine boughs, and taking from his pocket a rather large and gaudy cigarette case, opened it, and helping himself to a weed he was about to return the case to his pocket, hesitated, and in a rather patronizing tone exclaimed, "Will you smoke?"

"No — not just now," was Windy's reply; "but will you be good enough to tell me how you happened to drift up to these parts?"

"Well, you see, cousins are scarce articles to me, and when I learned just how affairs stood I made up my mind it was my right to know my

kin." Here he spent a few moments inhaling the smoke and sending it out in streaming lines from his large nostrils, then continuing, he remarked, "But you seem surprised to see me. I suppose you received my letter. How about it?"

"Yes, it was at our imposing post-office this morning and spoiled a climb I would have given a good deal to have taken. But how does it happen that I never heard my father speak of your family? Where is your father?"

"That's just it. If Father were alive I should not be standing here talking to you, and if your father stood here he would understand why I have come; but as you and I are their representatives, I will tell you why I am here. My name is Ben Anderson, and my father was your father's half brother. He was some years older and a kind you would call 'easy.' Your father in his day was quite a sport and found himself in many a scrape."

"Now look here, Cousin Ben, although I never knew of you until to-day, I am much surprised at what you tell me, for I never thought of Dad in such a light. He seemed a thoughtful sort and if the scrapes you speak of were of his making, I am very sure they were honest scrapes. But go on with your story," added Windy, in a sort of an apologetical tone for having broken in.

"Well, honest they may have been in the start — as to that I can't say — but at the finish they were anything but of that name for —"

Here Windy, who had been seated, with a quick spring was by the side of the speaker, while with hands clinched and face very pale, and with an unnatural cadence in his tone exclaimed, "Have a care, for though you be of my flesh and blood you cannot come here and insult my father's memory; for even as I know it is a cursed lie I will not allow such words to ring out upon the air where my father's honest voice used to be heard."

"Oh, very well," returned the oily tongued visitor, as he continued to enjoy his half-smoked cigarette; "but perhaps when you see the proof of which I was about to speak, you may not wish to be violent."

"Proof? proof? What proof can you or any one else have regarding my father's honesty?"

"Well, now, suppose you hear what I have to say, then I will show you my right to speak as I have and must." Windy reluctantly resumed his seat while his companion resumed,

"A few weeks before your father hied himself to this out-of-the-world place he forged my father's name for several thousand dollars. This was some few years ago. I only learned of it some weeks since from some papers which I found when looking over my late father's effects, and which in his own handwriting stated the case."

Here he glanced at Windy to see how he was taking the affair, but no sign of belief in the truth of his story could he detect. "You see, your father was not a lucky gambler and when he got in

so deep he could not get out, why he had to and did the easiest thing he could to square himself."

"In heaven's name why tell me more of this monstrous lie? Show me proofs if you can," came Windy's voice, which had grown hoarse from suppressed emotion.

"Just as you say — perhaps you did not know what an excellent penman your father was or at least what a remarkably good copyist — at any rate, gaze upon this." While drawling out his last few words, Ben Anderson had brought from his breast pocket an old, rusty-looking billbook and now having removed a rather yellow-looking check from its depths, was holding it before Windy's searching gaze.

After a close scrutinizing glance, followed by a low moan, Windy turned from his companion and buried his face in his hands, while the words, "Father! Father! how could you?" came audibly from his lips. For a few moments nothing save the sighing of the wind through the pines could be heard; then Windy asked, "Do you think my mother ever knew of it?"

"No, I am sure my father never divulged it, partly for the sake of the family name; then, again, I believe he was very fond of his brother Edward. The reason I am here is that I want you to make it up to me, for I am left almost without a shilling, and as I learned that the homestead had been cleared I thought it no more than my due that you should give me a lift as my father gave

one to yours. But come, old man," he continued, "do not take it so to heart; no one but us knows anything about it."

"Thank Heaven for that — and now, Ben, I will do what I can for you upon one condition. I do not know whether you have heard or not, but I have a young sister whom I have watched over since she was a tiny baby. She was my father's idol, and rather than have her learn of the condition of things as you have told me I would sacrifice everything. Hark! I hear now the sound of Gypsy's hoofs, and still those of another. Sis is coming and Joe must be with her. We will talk it over to-morrow; to-night you are simply our cousin who has come to spend a holiday."

Hardly before the words had left his lips, Windy was standing beside the steaming flanks of the two ponies, while he helped his Sis to alight. The twilight was fast spreading a mantle over the early autumn day as Roma greeted her brother, else she would have noticed the unusual pallor of his face; then, such was her amazement, upon reaching the piazza, to see a stranger standing there, that she had no thought for aught else.

Windy soon hastened to say, "Roma, this is the one from whom I received my letter to-day, which caused me to send Joe up the trail in my stead. He is our cousin, Ben Anderson, from the East."

Instantly the girl's face was alive with animation as she extended her hand, saying, "Why, this is nice, and a surprise. I did not know I had a

cousin. But now I must hurry, for I know you all must be hungry, and I have lots of news for you, Broth."

With a light spring she disappeared within, and soon her slight form could be seen by the two, who remained so silent since she had disappeared from the scene. Ben Anderson had been rather confused, and his usual confident manner had waxed a little less jubilant since the gray eyes of the girl had bidden him welcome, while he had returned her hand clasp and thanked her. And now, as the last gleam sank from view from the afterglow, Roma's voice was heard, bidding them to come and sup.

CHAPTER X

"What a dear child she is!" exclaimed Elanore Moulton, as she watched Roma until the last gleam of her scarlet ribbons faded from between the pines. "She is like a poor, untamed, little bird; I wish—" but here her soliloquy was interrupted by the return of Mr. and Mrs. Raynor, who had hastened to inquire for the day's mail.

"Well, Doctor, shall I call a wheel chair," laughingly inquired Amelia Raynor; "or will you and Mr. Raynor have a potato race upstairs?"

"Either is agreeable; what say you, partner in all my ridicule?"

"*Oui*," returned Mr. Raynor. At which the ladies pealed forth a laugh, for their gallant did look a bit as though he, too, could be easily satisfied. "But, do you know, I like Windy's Sis. Are we not going to see her again before we leave?" asked Mr. Raynor. "I think it would be very nice to have her and Windy dine with us to-morrow."

"That it would, Mr. Raynor," replied Dr. Moulton. "I have been thinking so, too, since we bade Roma good-by. But here you are at your room. I will join you both in the dining-

room after I have rested awhile, but will be punctual for dinner."

That night, like every night, all manner of different pictures might have been seen and studied around the tables spread for the evening's repast, as Dr. Moulton and the Raynors settled themselves once more in the unusually attractive dining apartment of the chalet, all dressed becomingly in the required custom of the day.

So another little party was assembled. Roma felt that her boys must be hungry, and so having prepared a real little dinner, she called them; and, in truth, a very inviting repast she had concocted; for when the two young men stepped into the unique room which acted as living- and dining-room, the aroma which greeted them was most gratifying, while Roma, as she assigned the new cousin his place, was most gracious, as a hostess should be.

The lamp, with its plain white shade, sent forth a dash of light which fell over and on Roma, showing the carmine in her cheeks, which vied with her scarlet throat-piece for brilliancy. The brown hand that poured the delicious-smelling coffee assumed an unusual poise as she caught the flash which now and again returned to her vision from her newly found treasure; for Roma, after having seen that the omelet was done to a turn and the toast just the shade of brown that Broth liked best, had slipped the ring on her finger and now was patiently waiting for his outburst of surprise.

"Well, Miss Roma," the suave voice of the guest began, after he had partaken of several not very dainty mouthfuls, "you are what a little girl told her auntie, that she was 'a good cooker.' Where did you learn the art?"

"Oh, I have had to learn to keep my boys from feeling that 'I-want-something-to-eat-I-don't-know-what feeling,'" returned Roma. Joe, who just entered the room, added his "Ha, ha," to the rather rough one of the newly found Ben.

"Well, Roma, that was a remark, sure enough. It is rather one on you and me, eh, Joe? But come, or your something will be cold," continued Windy. "This is Joe, my friend — Joe, this is a new-found cousin, Ben Anderson; and now, Joe, I shall want to hear all about your day — Did the lady — I mean the tall one they call Doc — did she enjoy it?"

The introduction of the young men had been rather brief, but somehow it seemed to Joe that a slight cloud had rested upon the good-natured face of his friend and pal, Windy; but it was instantly replaced by a look of real pleasure as he mentioned the name of the lady tourist.

"That she did. She bade me tell you that her young friend Windy was right; it was one of the pleasantest days and trips she ever took, and that she missed him much, but that his —"

"Joe, let me warm up your coffee, for it must be cold," interrupted Roma, as she reached out her

hand for the half-filled, generous cup at Joe's plate.

He hastened to comply, while Windy, turning toward Roma, said, "I want Dr. Moulton to see our 'Snuggly,' Sis, and you."

"Yes, but Roma has —"

"Oh, Joe, I am sorry to interrupt," Roma hastened to say, "but would you mind coming with me? I could not open a can of pears; I wish to have you all try," and instantly the young housewife, with Joe following in her wake, was headed toward the heart of the "Snuggly."

Once beyond the hearing of the ones remaining at table, Roma began: "Joe, you are awfully stupid. Did you not see I wanted to tell Broth myself, instead of having you spoil all my fun? But now that you are here you may open this for me, although I really and truly have not tried this special can."

"Well, you are a bluff one, to be sure; but, my eyes — where did you get," and before Roma could desist Joe had encased her ringed hand in his large one and was looking in great wonderment at the shining bauble.

"That is part of the secret I will tell you and Broth after our 'Snuggly' is tidied up for the evening. Come, now, get to your job, for I must hurry back, for it appears to me the new cousin is a bit hungry."

Upon the return they found Ben still doing jus-

tice to the supper, while he was apparently carrying on most of the conversation. Windy proved a very good listener, and more than once a subconscious thought stole over Roma that Broth seemed a little unlike his usual self, but in the excitement of the novel evening she did not find time for further thought regarding it. Strangely enough, however, the glint and glitter of the little new ring did not attract his attention until Roma was clearing away the remains of the repast.

Joe had invited Ben to join him while he took a look at the ponies before leaving them for the night. As the last sound of their retreating steps was heard, Windy, who had been sitting very quiet and still retaining his seat at table, suddenly became very agitated, and exclaimed, "Roma, what have you on your finger?" and before she could answer or even have her little fun of explaining regarding her first trinket, Windy, in a manner so violent as to almost frighten the girl, had again demanded an answer.

Poor Windy! He had had a hard battle to fight during the last few hours, nor was it little wonder he was unaccountable for his really rough manner, but to Roma, with whom he was always so tender and affectionate, it came like a bolt out of a clear sky, causing her to stand trembling like a poor little ewe lamb, until, frightened by his angry looks, she burst into tears.

Then and only then did the brother, who had been so tried by the shameful news he had learned

from the new cousin, realize the manner he had assumed toward his Sis. Instantly, he had reached her side and had folded her into his strong, boyish arms, while, if Roma had known, real tears fell upon her glossy hair, as she crept into his welcomed shelter. After the first violent sobs had subsided and Windy had patted the little flushed face, he drew the hand that had caused the tumult to his vision and repeated his question, trying to make his tones more like the familiar ones of her Broth.

"I found it — found it to-day, coming down the trail," came from the still-half-sobbing tones of Roma.

"Trail? What trail?" exclaimed the boyish voice. "Roma, where have you been to-day?"

At this, the girl drew herself from the arms that partly encircled her and, straightening her little figure, lifted her head until her gray eyes looked into the dark depths of her brother's, as she replied, "I wanted to see the lady you told me so much about and so I went up the Lake trail, but, Broth, you have no right to speak to me as you did. On our way back I found the ring, which I wore home just for to-night to surprise you; but,"— and here the ring was suddenly drawn off by a defiant motion and thrust into her brother's hand, while she continued—"I am sorry if I did such a great wrong, but—"

"Sis, my little Sis, forgive me; I did speak harshly to you — say you forgive me, for it shall

shall not happen again —” With a tender smile, though still with a questioning glance, Roma returned to his eagerly waiting embrace, then, drawing her to the large chair he had fashioned and she had made attractive with bright-colored cushions, he took her upon his knee and began plying her with all sorts of questions about her trip.

Soon her face was like a rose after a summer’s shower — fresh and fair, while a suggestion of dewdrops lingered there. The willing tongue, once loosed, flew blithely along, Windy drinking in the pictures which followed one another as they passed to him from the graphic description of the narrator.

“So the doc is coming up here to see us — you are sure, Sis,” Windy exclaimed, after he had enjoyed a hearty laugh at the way Roma had described the doc’s frantic grasping of her bridle on the descending trail.

“Oh, yes; she said she must see our ‘Snuggly.’ I do not wonder you liked her; I —” and here a thoughtful look stole into the gray eyes, and but for the sound of returning steps there might have passed into a brother’s keeping a glimpse of a lonely little life.

With a subtle movement Windy lifted his Sis and, placing her in the chair they had both occupied, turned and, opening the outer door, let in the spicy evening air, for their home nestled among the pines. The lad loved his sister with a fervent love, but the boy’s fear of ridicule would show it-

self, now and again; and just now he felt that he did not care to be found showing too much sentiment before the new-comer, but, not wishing to wound Sis, he had left her and assumed an interest in the cousin he little felt, as he stood in the doorway waiting for Ben, who, with Joe following, shedding the light from a lantern to guide him, came into view.

"Well, Joe, Sis sort of stole a march on me to-day, didn't she? I am very glad she enjoyed it so well, and now I am going to ask you boys to join me upon the piazza for a smoke, as I am afraid if we all fire up here we shall drive our little housekeeper out of her domain." Whereupon Windy, stepping to his sister's side, playfully pulled her ear, as he continued, "Now, is not your protector thoughtful to-night?"

"Yes, Roma, I think Pal is right. He always is, you know. I am afraid we might make it a trifle hazy if given time enough," and Joe's "ha ha" broke forth, thus ending his speech.

"Well, perhaps so—" returned the girlish voice. "I will remain here and just begin with my wonderful day, thinking it all over—and it will not be bad fun either, for it has been a jolly one."

After a pull at their pipes, which lasted longer than they would have believed, the trio reentered the "Snuggy," to find a little creature lying silent and peaceful in the depths of the big chair wrapped in the arms of Morpheus, the scarlet rib-

bon and kerchief still giving the added touch to a lovely picture.

How tender both the voices were as they with gentle words wakened the sleeper, and laughingly making a cradle for her with their entwined arms, they bore her away to her little room — she calling out, "Good night," to the new cousin, who was just looking on.

CHAPTER XI

It was long into the night ere Windy Anderson fell into a troubled sleep, for learning that the father whom he had always regarded as above reproach could have so far forgotten his manliness as to stoop to such a deed as the new-found cousin had proved, was a crushing blow to the lad. Then, again, he did not like Ben; why, he could not tell, but it did not seem as if he could have him become an inmate of the "Snuggy" where, except for the loss of their parents, Sis and he had been so happy. To be sure, Joe was there, but that was different; he was just Joe. Then, although Ben had promised not to, in any way, acquaint Sis of the disgrace, if she should find out from something he might let drop, her life would be spoiled, for Sis had idolized her da-da, as she called him.

The first consciousness that Windy experienced was Sis's voice calling him — a very unusual thing, for he was an early riser and often spent an hour or so in the field before breakfast. He had continued on with the raising of wheat, as his father had started, though as yet he did not have a very large acreage, but hoped in time to realize much more from the enlargement of the project. Joe

and he had planted a small garden where they raised all the vegetables that supplied the table. So, together with the fees Windy picked up as a guide, he had started a nest-egg in the bank at the nearest town.

Hardly believing his ears as he answered his Sis, Windy hastily arose, wondering why he felt so unlike himself, when like a flash the whole event of the preceding night came rushing over him; but, like many another, he put his shoulder to the wheel and when he greeted Roma a little later he laughingly said, "Well, Sis, you had your sleep first last night, so I thought I would be last this morning."

To Ben he appeared agreeable, but Joe, who happened to be standing near when the cousins met, again felt a slight friction seeming to arise from the contact of the two. "Well, come; I must have kept you all from breakfast and you must be famished," continued Windy.

Some little time after they had finished their morning meal Windy came into the kitchen where Roma was busy with her work, and exclaimed, "Well, Sis, I see you are right at it — you will have to ask for higher wages as you will have one more hungry fellow to feed."

"I will take him at the same pay I have been getting," laughed the rosy maid, flying about like a little swallow, "for he will not stay long enough to pay me to raise my price."

"I do not know about that, Sis. You see, he

is our coz, and has always wanted to live in the West. He believes there is money to be made out here in wheat and various ways. Now, what do you say if he wants to remain? ”

“ Well, of course, as he is our cousin we should try and help him, I suppose, but — ”

“ But what, Roma? Do you not like him? ”

“ Oh, it is not that,” continued the girl, “ but somehow it will all seem different — but there, perhaps he will not enjoy it as much as he thinks.”

Windy here walked toward the door, simply because he could not keep the thought silent as under his breath he muttered, “ Dear Heaven, I hope it may prove so.”

“ And now, ‘ Fanchon my cricket,’ I am going to ride upon several errands, and shall stop at the chalet before I return, so you must let me take the ring back and see if there is an owner for it. Also, I shall see my doc. Have you any message for her? ”

“ Oh, yes, Brother; take her my best love and tell her I want her to be sure and not forget to come and see our ‘ Snuggly ’ before she goes home. I will get the ring, but do hope you will not find an owner — then it will be mine. You must invite Mr. and Mrs. Raynor to come up with the doctor, for they are very nice.”

When Roma stepped upon the porch she saw that Ben was already mounted upon Joe’s Scotty, and Glossy, her brother’s horse, stood pawing the ground, anxious to be upon the move, or, as Roma

said, reminding her of the sugar he did not mean she should forget. Nor had she, for her little brown hand had suddenly reached out a goodly bit as she laid it flat under the dilated nostrils of the good beast, and neither was Scotty forgotten.

Ben evidently had been in the saddle before, but his appearance was not to the saddle born. Windy, on the contrary, was a very Don Quixote, and Roma watched him with a proud, loving expression upon her face until his last wave answered her own, and the descent hid him from her gray eyes.

Meantime, Mrs. Raynor and Dr. Moulton were having a very spirited conversation regarding the poor little ring Roma was hoping very hard no one would claim.

"Do you know, when I wound my watch upon retiring last night I missed my little charm that I have worn so many years and, search as I did, I have not found it. I am so sorry about it," and Mrs. Raynor looked quite disturbed for her.

"What was it, a rabbit's foot or a four-leaf clover?" asked her companion.

"Ah, my dear, something dearer to me than almost anything I possess. A little signet ring with the initials A. E. P. upon it. You see, I have a half brother much younger than myself, but as there are only we two, he seems as near to me as my own brother."

"Oh, Mrs. Raynor, did you wear it up the trail yesterday?" asked her companion in a very quiet

tone, while she almost dreaded the answer, for the bright face of Roma seemed suddenly to appear before her, a disappointed look deepening the gray eyes.

"Yes, I had it on when I left the chalet. But why do you ask? Has any one seen it?" eagerly returned Amelia Raynor, adding, "I gave it to Allyn when he was fifteen years old and when he outgrew it I begged it back as my own, and I have worn it ever since."

"Poor little Roma! I think you will not be able to sport your newly found trinket very long, even if you did wish very hard that an owner might not be found," thought Elanore Moulton, and she told of the finding of a ring by the girl Roma, adding, "I am very glad, Mrs. Raynor, that you will have your trinket back, and I can imagine how you must prize it, but if you could have heard the glad cry and seen the look in her expressive face you would feel just a little sorry that the owner had come to light."

"I shall buy her a nice little one when I return and send it right back to her," eagerly exclaimed Mrs. Raynor; "but, do you suppose she will send it back?"

"Yes, indeed, she told me that Brother should return it upon the morrow, but she did so want to show it to her boys, as she called Windy and Joe."

As the lads passed from Roma's lingering gaze they neither spoke for some little way, until Ben, who had been busying himself securing a cigarette

as his starter for the day, broke out so abruptly as to cause Glossy and his master both to start perceptibly. "Well, I suppose it is all right for me to send for my belongings. I have not many, but what I have I would like."

"Yes, Ben, you may as well get them. I told Sis this morning that you might remain for a lengthy visit. But, Ben, remember. If one word gets to my little girl that you have told to me, you and I will be through forever."

"Oh, I will take care of that part," his companion returned, while the look that darted from his eyes and the smile that sneered from his thick lips might have caused a feeling not only of antipathy but one of guarded caution if they had been beheld; as it was, Windy, who had not even glanced at him since their start, intuitively felt a sense of antagonism, though, if he had been asked why, he could not have explained.

Their conversation lagged much of the way and it was with a great sense of satisfaction that Windy caught the first glimpse of the picturesque chalet, and expressed his intention to stop there. "You may ride about, Ben. I shall not be long, but I have a message for a tourist I met some few days ago, and will join you later."

"Oh, suit yourself," was the reply, although it was very evident Ben had not expected to be turned off in such an unceremonious manner. As Windy turned up the drive that led under the porte-

cochère, he met Mrs. Raynor and the doctor just emerging, and hastily alighting he turned to meet them.

"Well, well, Windy. You are a great chap, to be sure, to paint such a graphic alluring picture of the trail and then at the last moment to forsake us and leave us to the tender mercies of another. I would not forgive you save for the fact that I met your dear little Sis," chattered Elanore Moulton.

"Yes, Doc. She has told me all about your trip, and it was a gala day for her, I can tell you; but if you knew how I missed it myself, you would not believe it," returned Windy. Here he turned to Mrs. Raynor and inquired if the ride had put the mister out of business, to which they all had a jolly laugh.

Just then Mr. Raynor hove in sight, and learning that the laugh was upon him, exclaimed, "That's all right; keep it up. But, my lad, I shall kidnap that Sis of yours out of spite if for nothing more, if you make fun of me. Now, we want you both to come and have dinner with us to-morrow, for we leave the day following and must see her at least again."

"Thank you, Mr. Raynor, very much; it is jolly fine of you, but Sis and I want you all to come to us, and if you have only one more day you must come to-morrow. It is not so very steep and a much easier ride in every way than to the

Lake trail." Here he turned to Dr. Moulton and in a very earnest tone continued, "You will come, won't you, Doc?"

"Yes, Windy, I think I will, for we all must say good-by to Roma, and if you would rather we visit you, I expect you have won."

"Oh, thank you, Doc. I always thought you were a dandy and now I know it," Windy exclaimed with great enthusiasm.

"Even if I do sometimes sign myself Miss; eh, Windy?"

They straightway laid their plans as to how they should make the ascent the next day, deciding Joe should come for them. It was thought best that they should ride the same ponies as the day before. Dr. Moulton exclaimed, "We are sure that they brought us safely home once and we will trust to them and luck to accomplish it once more."

Here Windy was obliged to enter the chalet and Mr. Raynor strolled off in another direction. No sooner were they out of sight than Amelia Raynor, who had been very silent for the last few moments, exclaimed, "I expect our young friend has gone to make inquiry relative to his little Sis's bauble."

"I have not a doubt of it, but here he comes," returned her companion.

"I have been in to inquire if any one had lost a ring," Windy said, as he approached the ladies. "Doc, Sis did so want to wear it just last night. I have left it at the desk, but I hope the same as

Sis does, that no one will claim it, for it made her so happy."

For a moment there was no remark, until finally Amelia Raynor spoke, saying, "Somehow I feel that no one will ever claim it," whereupon Elanore Moulton passed her arm through that of her companion, and if there was an unusual warmth in the contact, no one but themselves were the wiser.

Sending their love to Roma and telling Windy they would see him again soon, they bade him good-by. Windy spent considerable time trying to learn the whereabouts of his Cousin Ben, but after a lengthened hunt he decided he must have returned up the trail, and so he too turned Glossy in that direction. His surmise proved right, for when he came in sight of the Snuggy there sat Ben, big as life, upon the piazza, still puffing at his inevitable cigarette.

CHAPTER XII

Such excitement as prevailed the next morning throughout the Snuggy. Roma was astir with the birds and at no little time later she had given each lad, even Ben, his task.

"You see, Broth, it is my first real party, and it must be a success."

Little did the boys realize the depths of womanly intuitiveness which the girl possessed. If she had been accustomed to dinner parties every day she could not have carried out in many ways a more unique or pleasing program. They did not know of the thoughts that flashed through the mind of the little housewife as she lay with flushed cheek pressed into her pillow the previous night, trying to woo the sleep that simply would not come, until finally, when detail after detail had passed and re-passed, she, from sheer mental fatigue, at last succumbed, and now she was carrying into effect the outgo of her mental picture.

"Now, Joe, you and Ben may carry this table out on the piazza for me; it is much too lovely a day to remain indoors. And then, Joe," Roma continued, "I would like you to take down the Navajo blankets that Father bought from the friendly chief the first year we settled here. What

lovely colors they use! Do you remember the box of trinkets they sent us one Christmas? I expect Mother and Dada knew all about it long before we did. You see, Cousin Ben, we could not go shopping as the children in the cities do, and we had not passed the age of Santa, so the gifts of the bright toys were very dear to us. I have always kept them. They are now packed away, but I mean to use them upon my table to-day."

"Hurrah! Sis, you are the girl; but how on earth did you ever think of that idea," exclaimed Windy, spinning across the room and lifting Roma by the elbows, he held her poised in air.

"Well, you see, as Mother used to say, 'Necessity is the mother of invention,' but, Broth, you stop your meddling and keep at work. I want you to cut me a small, well-shaped pine tree for my table, while I go and hunt up my Indian trinkets."

"Very good, Minnehaha, at your service."

Here Joe, who was unfastening the blanket which hung from one side of the Snuggy and which made such a picturesque draping, turned, while the eye of the manly Hiawatha could not have beamed forth more adoration than did his as he looked down on the girl Roma. Ben, happening to turn at that moment, was a witness to the scene, and as he passed quietly out on the porch under some feigned pretense, a long low whistle resounded upon the clear autumn air.

The piazza, where they were to hold their fête,

had a southern exposure, and the air, so fragrant and spicy, was borne to Roma as she flitted about. She first arranged the bright Navajo covering over the table where it lay in dignified repose, the ends falling in graceful folds to the floor. Then such a medley of articles as were brought forth from the depths of the box that she had kept in hiding. With a long string of beads she made a trail, extending the entire length of the table, a distance of some few inches in width, while here and there she had single pine twigs to act as trees, while moss was used on either side of the trail, giving a touch of soft green which looked very realistic. A little more than half way the length of the table she had formed two miniature lakes by using pieces of mirror glass and surrounding them thickly with moss and lichen. By the lake's side she moored two very good sized toy canoes, which she intended utilizing later as dishes for her viands. A little further along she, with Windy's help, erected the symmetrical little pine tree he had cut for her, while under its spreading branches she placed a miniature tent made partly of birch bark, while the entrance was of twisted sweet grass. It was a very unique bit of work, and had been constructed by one of the Indian lads, and this she now planned to represent the Refuge at the summit of the trail where she had stood when first spying the party who were to be her guests to-day. At each place a small moccasin was placed to designate where the guests were to be

seated. These were filled with wild flowers, there being no two alike, and which Joe declared was certainly the finishing touch.

As Roma stood back, looking with critical eyes on her handiwork, she could not but feel a glow of pride, for it did present a very gala appearance; while Ben, who had sauntered up just at the moment, complimented her so highly, exclaiming, "Why, Roma, you have certainly lost your calling; you should have been a decorator. A society lady could not have done better."

With such hearty approval she decided the arrangement would do, and began to think of the more substantial part. Soon the kitchen was sounding and resounding to the merry refrains which rang forth from the lips of the busy lass, as she concocted tempting morsels for the pleasure of all. As the hour of noon began to tick itself into prominence, Roma disappeared, soon to reappear a veritable Indian maiden, for she had donned a real typical costume, one she had played Minnehaha in many times.

"Well, Sis, I think you will do," exclaimed Windy, as he surveyed her with much pride, "and I expect Doc will think so too."

Ere long a faint halloo was heard in the direction of the trail and soon again a louder one. Instantly Roma and Windy were on the alert. Roma remained at the entrance of the Snuggly to welcome, while Windy hastened to assist the ladies to alight. Such exclamations they uttered as to

the beauty of the view obtained from the elevation, the quaintness of the building, and above all the picturesqueness of their young hostess.

Dr. Moulton again folded the motherless girl in her arms, while Windy, who stood near, really wished he also might be included, for he had taken an unaccountable fancy to the lady tourist and felt that if his Sis could have such a friend life would be much brighter; for, boy as he was, he realized somewhat the need of womanly comradeship for her.

Such a merry party as they were! The Snuggly was not only admired, but snap-shots of every part were taken by the doctor, who was quite carried away by its uniqueness.

Soon Roma hospitably announced dinner by knocking ingeniously upon an old pewter platter which Windy had found buried and which they always had felt must have been the property of the Indians. Windy offered Dr. Moulton his arm in the most approved fashion, while Mr. Raynor followed with Roma, the charming Minnehaha; Mrs. Raynor fell to the lot of Ben, for Joe insisted upon serving them, as he declared Roma had been quite busy enough.

If ardent enthusiasm alone was needed for the success of the dinner it was not withheld, for the ladies were so pleased and surprised at Roma's program that they could not say enough, while the gentlemen not only did enjoy the gala appearance of the spread but did their best at the tasty repast.

"Well, Roma, you may apply at any time for the position of cook at my home," exclaimed Mr. Raynor, as he helped himself to another portion of the egg salad that looked very tempting where the young chef had arranged it upon lettuce leaves in one of the canoes, while in the other was a tempting display of muffins, good to behold, cold boiled ham sliced to a nicety, "escaloped potatoes rivaling her own mother's," Dr. Moulton declared, while, to cap the whole, was a lemon meringue pie and "really having a meringue," Windy said. Then, turning to Mr. Raynor, he continued, "What, pray, should we do without our cook if she accepted such a proposal as yours? Do you suppose we boys would get a pie like that every day? Well, I wonder!"

"There, Broth, that is quite enough," returned Roma, but the sweet, contented little smile which accompanied her rebuke was very pleasant to see. Joe proved a very handy waiter, while Ben made himself most agreeable and really succeeded in being quite an entertaining conversationist.

Their luncheon over, where so regally the inner man had been appeased, the guests asked their hostess to show them the Snuggy, to which she acquiesced, as she was quite proud of her little home among the pines.

As Elanore Moulton watched the young girl and realized her position, a sense of protectorship stole over her and she felt that perhaps God in His great far-seeing mercy had sent her on this

trail, the end of which might prove of benefit to the orphaned girl. A little later, when Windy entered the Snuggly, she asked him to come and sit by her, and when after a goodly amount of honest praise had been given the little domain, Dr. Moulton suddenly put her hand on her companion's arm and said, "Windy, you cannot realize perhaps what this visit has been to me, but I want you to know that somehow both you and your sister have stolen into my heart and if the time should ever come when either of you need a friend I will be one to you both."

"Doc, how can I thank you enough? You are surely a trump, and you must have been sent here to help me out. Many times I have felt that perhaps Sis should not live here, here with no other comradeship than Joe's and mine. She should go to school somewhere, but where, that has been the part that has troubled me. You see, we have a tiny nest egg and I know that our parents would have sent Sis away, if they had lived, for both know the value of an education, and had very good ones themselves. As for me, they meant that I should go, but that's a thing now of the past; reasons have sprung up that will keep me here a-pegging. But Sis, now more than ever, I wish might go. You see, our new cousin has shown a great liking for the West and has asked to remain with us for a spell. I cannot refuse him, but I do not intend that Sis shall stay here and become a

little household drudge for we three lumbering fellows."

"Bravo, my young friend," interrupted Elanore Moulton, "you have spoken worthy to be the brother of such a sweet Sis. I, too, have been thinking, and am fully persuaded that Providence has sent me to know and admire you folks. There is a splendid school for young ladies not far from my home, not a fashionable, elegant sort of place, but a good refined school where a practical education can be obtained and where the girls lead happy, industrious lives and where they may fit themselves for useful vocations. The fee is not an extravagant one by any means, and if Roma should go I promise to watch over her and make her happy."

"I am sure of that, Doc, but suppose we speak to Sis about the project and see how she takes it. What say you, my little Minnehaha?" continued Windy Anderson, as Roma approached the corner where they were seated and where the ardent brother soon made room for her by himself. "How would you like to live near the Doc and go to school?"

"Pray, pardon me, Windy, for interrupting, but I want Doctor Moulton to see some of Roma's sketches and also her water colors; then she will almost insist upon her going somewhere to improve her talent, for I think it very marked that she has unusual genius in that line," explained Mrs. Ray-

nor, holding to view a sketch of much promise, giving a glimpse of a trail where the tall trees twined their green branches, covering the pathway beneath with lights and shadows, until one looking could almost hear the gentle sighing of the wind and inhale the fragrance of the wood.

"So ho! my little chef is an artist as well," commented Elanore Moulton, "and a very good one, I quite agree with Mrs. Raynor; and now there is all the more need for you to study."

"I would love dearly to go if it were not for leaving Broth," Roma replied, "but I do not see how I could go and leave the three boys here to care for themselves; they would make a fine mess of our little Snuggy."

"Well, Roma, my child, you and Broth talk it over, and when the right time comes you may be sure we shall all make you very welcome and see to your needs. My home will always be wide open to you both, and Mr. and Mrs. Raynor will second the motion, I am sure. And now," continued Dr. Moulton, "I think we must say *au revoir*, much as we dislike to. To-morrow morning will soon be on us and I have many things to do upon arriving at the chalet; so, my little Minnehaha and my stanch guide, I want to thank you again for this delightful day and I assure you it will never leave my consciousness. I want you, Roma child, to write me, for I shall feel that a part of myself has been left here with you in this calm wooded abode."

With great tenderness Elanore Moulton bade

farewell to the young girl, and both felt that something had passed into and from their lives that day that nothing could efface — a true friendship that was pure as refined gold.

The late afternoon sun flickered round and about the descending party as the doctor and her companions turned many times to look back at the friends who lovingly and steadfastly watched their descent. Windy, with his arm thrown about his Sis, stood almost unconsciously watching the rapt gaze of the face beside him, then turning he followed long the departing figure of his newly found friend, while almost reverently the words, "God bless you both," fell upon the pine-scented air.

CHAPTER XIII

"Yes, Mrs. Moulton, you had scarcely turned Busy Bee's head round the first corner when on answering the bell there stood — but you cannot guess," and here Betsy's black face glowed and gleamed, while her round bead-like eyes fairly danced with suppressed animation.

"Well, Betsy, I am sure it is some one you either like very much or think that I do, or both; but as for guessing, I am not quick at that, so help me out, that's a good soul."

"He is coming again and to-night, for I asked him to," and here Betsy's wrinkled visage looked a little awed, for, trusty servant that she was and had been for many years, she felt that even she had boundaries.

"I am sure," she continued a little more confidently, "you will not mind when you know who it is, and then, you see, Miss Elanore arrives in time for dinner, so I asked him for that."

Mrs. Moulton's gentle face had assumed more dignity than she felt, but she thought it best to hold Betsy with a little tighter check than usual, for since her daughter's departure some weeks previous she had wielded her scepter with a most unrestrained fashion.

"Well, Betsy, I must say that I am surprised, for you remember Miss Elanore is rather particular as to her guests, and as she will likely be quite tired after her long ride, I am afraid you have overstepped a bit."

Betsy by this time had hastened to the hall where she secured the bit of white paper which she felt certain would make all the amends necessary, and returning handed it to her mistress, still with a subdued look of satisfaction at her demeanor.

At sight of the name which meant so much to many as well as to the one in whose hand the card rested, a look of intense pleasure lighted up the refined features, while the title of Hon. Allyn E. Prentice, Los Angeles, Cal., resounded in the room, followed by the words, "Betsy, you did exactly right. At what time is he to come?"

"He could not exactly say, Missey, but in time for to dine. I is so glad you is glad, and I's sure the Mister and Master Rupert would be could they know, and perhaps they do, no telling. Now I'll fly, for the doctor will want everything so-so, as it always had to be in the college days, when young Prentice used to come home with young Master, that was before he had a handle to his name—eh, Missey,"—this with an accompanying look into which had crept a tenderness which was far from being feigned.

"Yes, Betsy." Here a slight turn almost unconsciously found Mrs. Moulton with glance directed to two portraits, evidently of father and son, both

with the same frank, manly expression beaming from the clear dark eyes. For a little space of time Mrs. Moulton stood lost in thought, when remembering herself, she, turning to speak, found that she was alone. Betsy had gone. "Ah, my husband and son, we all remember you with such thoughts of love, but none more loyally than Betsy."

Seeking her room, Mrs. Moulton dressed in some haste, so that she might have ample time to give the finishing touches to the necessary arrangements below. Tastefully she arranged the flowers in the richly appointed rooms, not forgetting the usual tokens at the beloved portraits. She also attended the laying of the grate in the library, for Elanore had a special love for a cozy fire, even though plenty of fresh-scented, autumn air was carried into the roomy apartment.

Having finished her further inspection as to table acquisitions, she returned and, seating herself, gave memory complete sway. How long she sat there she did not know; she was recalled by hearing her child's voice, accompanied by one of deeper tone, and quickly starting she hastened toward the sound, only to be intercepted before she could fully realize it by the strong, warm embrace of her beloved daughter's arms.

"Elanore — Allyn, where in the world —"

"Yes, right here in a very busy world," continued the deep voice of the gentleman, who wanted to give her a little time for composure.

"Why, Mother, you have been so long alone, you had forgotten my silent entrée,"—here turning toward her companion she added in an apologetical tone, "You see, I have added an M.D. to my name, consequently the latch key. But, Mother mine,"—this as the new-comer had tightly grasped the elder lady's hand—"is it not good to welcome Rupert's friend?"

Such a busy evening as the trio passed! Betsy was all smiles as she served them in her most patronizing manner, and her bright eyes scarcely left the masculine member of the party except to attend to her duties. Such yarns as they did spin! She afterward remarked to Mrs. Moulton, as some time later she stepped into the kitchen to test the coffee that was to be served in the library, "Why, I could 'most smell the pine needles and see the great snow-capped mountains, and to think that Miss Elanore and Massa Allyn have seen the same wonderful sight!"

"Yes, it was very nice for them both," returned her mistress; "and almost singular too that they should pass through with only a few hours between."

Meanwhile in the hospitably furnished library more yarns were in progress.

"I am so sorry you had to make such a hurried trip of it all, for it is a country that is too grand to leave until one actually has to. I feel that I shall never again see such stars as those I viewed from between and over God's gigantic towers,

nor such clear limpid water — can I ever forget it?”

“You are as great a lover of nature as was your brother,” returned Allyn Prentice. “He would rather tramp it for hours through mountains and glen than any other fellow I ever met; but you are certainly right about the territory which we have just passed through. I was awed when we ‘made the loop,’ winding down in and about like a huge viper with its subtleness and strength, and, if you believe me, I really envied the trainmen their quietness and freedom to live near old Mother Earth, as I passed the almost isolated huts by the wayside.”

“It is a shame you cannot go back that way, for then you could visit the most original ‘snuggy’ you could imagine; for as I have carte blanche to it, it would be well worth your while,”— here Dr. Moulton’s face assumed a more thoughtful, more tender aspect than her companion had seen upon it since she enfolded her mother in her embrace.

“Well, pray, what may a ‘snuggy’ be?” inquired her companion, with a slight gleam of amusement in his rather critical eyes. “It is surely a new figure of speech to me.”

“Just a home, or rather homestead, way back up a trail, where the pines whisper and sigh, and where live a brother and sister with love so strong for each other that no sordidness could ever wean one from the other — a love so beautiful to behold,” said Elanore Moulton.

"Well, it is rather unfortunate I am not permitted to embrace such a picture, but perhaps it is better so, for, you see, my dear Doctor, a lawyer's heart cannot afford to grow too soft; but, pray, tell me more of the pair."

Here Mrs. Moulton, accompanied by Betsy carrying a tray on which a coffee urn with its steaming contents figured prominently, brought the conversation to a standstill for the moment, and when later it was resumed the topic, at least by one, had been forgotten.

Over their coffee, mother and daughter listened, as Allyn Prentice told them of California, of his work and aspirations, until it seemed as if once more the years had rolled back and he was a lad again. There had been only a very few years between Rupert and Elanore Moulton and Allyn Prentice. The latter had been reared by a maiden aunt in a thriving New England city, where he had practically been his own master long before he cast his first ballot. He had always admired his aunt, but she had been what the world calls a practical woman; always keenly alert as to the standard of Allyn's examination papers, even when he, as a lad, attended the preliminary school. He, naturally a very good scholar, tried even harder, as his aunt always made it a point of adding or subtracting from his allowance in proportion as his average went up or down the line. Thus instilled in his youthful mind that success depended upon his own exertion, he had year by year put

forth much energy, until now at thirty-five years of age he had risen even beyond his most ardent hopes. As a lawyer, he had long been counted as one of the keenest, while for the past few years he had given it his attention to the extent of his time, until he had come to be known as California's Criminal Lawyer; but just as he always was, Allyn Prentice lacked the tenderness and sympathy which many a clever lawyer possessed and which in the loss of a loving mother and tender environment he had been deprived of. His one thought for years had been self, name, position, glory. If he had ever had a real tenderness in his life, it had been years back in his college days and for his friend and roommate, Rupert Moulton. He had been lionized for years. As for matrimony, he had not thought it worth the trouble, although his vanity had been appeased many times by tributes from the fair sex.

It had been several years now since his visit East, and much as Mrs. Moulton and Elanore enjoyed his visit they both felt that, clever and entertaining as he was, there was a trace of blasé in his bearing of which he evidently was unaware. He was then on his way to Washington, D. C., upon some special case then pending in the Supreme Court.

Swiftly the evening passed until Allyn Prentice announced his intended leaving, as he was obliged to take a very early train next morning. The added persuasion of Mrs. Moulton and Elanore for him to remain their guest over night did not prevail, as he declared his very early start impera-

tive, and that their kindness and hospitality should not suffer from his early hours.

“And now I hope some day you will think well of running out to the land of flowers, when I will do my best to show you some of the beauties of the country of which I am so proud.”

His leave-taking was very sincere and both Mrs. Moulton and Elanore felt an extreme tenderness for him for auld lang syne. Still the doctor could not refrain from adding as his hand parted from hers, “I forgot to tell you more about the Snuggy; but then, you see, lawyers better not have carte blanche to such places.” His laughing answer, “No, better so; but then, who knows?” accompanied his tall figure as the door closed upon him.

CHAPTER XIV

A glorious autumn followed in which the little creatures of the scented woods were Roma's next guests. The squirrels became so friendly as they scampered to and fro getting in their harvest that the girl, as she talked and mimicked them, felt that she learned of their secrets as she exchanged with hers.

Roma was changed. She herself admitted it, and as for the lads, they felt it sorely. Still, she was ever alert as to their welfare and busied herself with a song on her lips; however, one or other of her boys, as she called them, would often come upon her sitting very quietly with a thoughtful expression upon her sensitive face, while at times wistfulness keenly apparent glowed at them, called forth by subconscious communion with her own thoughts.

Joe was the first to feel the difference; still, never a word did there pass from his lips to Windy, for he knew that there had been some talk of Roma's going away to school and he feared that if her brother were brought to see the sense of loneliness he felt certain was now creeping into her life, he would urge her going. That secrecy was a selfish thing on his part Joe acknowledged, as

he felt the warm blood in his veins grow and then subside into slow pulsations as he again thought of what her absence would mean to him. But the day came when Windy put the question to him direct.

The boys had both been away guiding tourists and had at the urgent request of the party left the ponies for the night at a stable near the chalet where they were to be used for a ride by moonlight. The lads, who were to be well remunerated, decided to foot it back to the Snuggy. It was a crisp autumn afternoon, the air having a zest like champagne, and the friends bent their young strength as they climbed up the steep ascent. Windy seemed a trifle sober, but as the beauty of his surroundings stole over him from mere association he became brighter, until he seemed more like the Windy of old. Their jokes sent forth many a reëchoing laugh as they still continued on their way. As they neared the top of the climb, Windy exclaimed, "Let's make Sis think we are a couple of brigands, and steal in on her; she, not hearing the ponies as they usually carry us up, will indeed be off her guard."

"Perhaps she too may be having a tramp," answered Joe in rather an off-hand manner, for he still remembered the somber looks he had been a witness to when she had felt herself unobserved.

But Windy seemed to think it quite a lark, so stealthily they approached the door, which they reached by crouching low from the side of the trail

to the large pines which stood near the Snuggy. But what could it mean, for Windy, with knuckles poised to announce himself, halted, while unmistakable sobs were borne to the lads' ears and coming straight from the Snuggy? Still — still as death — both lads remained, but a guilty look was creeping into the eyes of Joe, and after a moment's pause, he laid his hand on the arm of his friend while the words, "I should have told you before," came from his quivering lips.

"Told what, Joe? Be quick." Here a vision of the city cousin came before him and with bated breath and clinched hand he stood expecting to hear that his dead father in some way had been maligned and Sis — his Sis — had learned of it.

"Just this, Windy; your sister is grieving for companionship; the companionship such as we lubbers cannot give her. I have seen it coming since the time that your doc said good-by, but I, like a selfish lout, have kept it from you, for — well —" — and here the honest face flushed deep under its coat of tan — "because I could not bear that she should leave us."

Windy grasped the hand of Joe fervently, for he felt not only sympathy but gratitude that his worst fears had proved groundless. Instead of the silent entry they had planned, a usual boyish announcement was the result, preceded by an amount of stepping not of the lightest sort, accompanied by a prolonged conversation.

"I will come in later," Joe exclaimed, as after

a few moments they heard Roma's steps coming to the door.

With gentle thoughtfulness they had allowed her time to recover herself in a measure, still Joe felt that no one but Broth should encroach on her at a moment when the depths of her heart were in such sore trouble. It was, therefore, Broth alone that met the sad-eyed girl, who eagerly appeared to be gay, though the mist was hardly free from the gray eyes where an assumed gleam reigned instead.

"Why — what — has anything happened?" exclaimed Roma, a look of fear following the sadness in her eyes as she noticed the retreating figure of Joe and beheld her brother, each without his pony.

"No — no, Sis, just a chance to gain a little more of the wherewithal to send you to Pennsylvania to get some larning," cheerily answered Windy as he drew her gently into the Snuggly, the darkness inside proving a friend indeed, as neither wished the other to realize the tumult that reigned in their innermost thoughts.

Windy was most graphic in his conversation to Sis, as she busied herself getting supper for her boys. Soon Joe tramped in, and a merry meal they tried to make for the girl, although both watched her furtively while there and then they felt that it was indeed a changed Roma from their comrade of former times.

From that on Windy watched his Sis keenly, and many little remarks he dropped as to the time

when she should return to them a real up-to-date young woman, but not a word of her actual time of leaving, until one day he received a letter post-marked Pennsylvania, and in unmistakably a lady's handwriting. Somehow that night, as he made his way up the familiar trail that led to the Snuggy, it seemed that indeed the last tie that bound him to the homestead would soon be severed, for he realized the time had come for Sis — his Sis — to leave her lonely home and seek the companionship of others. How he too would like to go out into the world for a time! Not that he did not love the woods and the trail — no, for these were his life — but the constant society of Ben, Ben the overbearing, was wearing to his nerves. To be sure, the city cousin was away a good bit of the time, going often to the next settlement where he had become chummy with a gang of real boys, as Joe laughingly called them. This took him away many an evening, in fact several days had been known to pass without his returning, and then in a most irritable state of mind. At present he was taking a week's tramp in which to get acquainted, as he remarked, "with game both untamed and otherwise." He was to have as comrade one of his cronies, and when at last he said his good-by none at the Snuggy were at all sad at his departure. Roma many times in the past months had put the question to her brother as to his length of stay, but was always answered to the effect that he was their cousin, therefore they must

make him welcome. And now Windy was indeed very glad that Ben was away upon a hunt, for he knew that Sis would want to spend her last few days with her boys, for the title had been dear to Joe and himself long before the third lad had arrived to be included in the list.

That evening as they all sat in the cosy sitting-room of the Snuggly, Windy suddenly left the room, only to return in a few minutes holding a letter which he placed into his Sis's hands, saying, "It is all really true, my lassie. Joe and I are only waiting to—" but Roma heard no more, for she was being transplanted many miles away as she read with bated breath and gleaming eyes, until a long-drawn, half-sobbed, half-ecstatic "Oh!" escaped her.

The next moment she was kneeling at Windy's feet, while a convulsed little figure was sobbing as the boys had heard her before, though she had never dreamed of it. Now, as before, Joe stole noiselessly from the room, while an answering sob was not far from the surface in his own manly throat.

"Oh, Broth, I am so glad but"—and here her earnest eyes searched his face—"are you sure you can spare me? You see, I will come again in June and then perhaps I may never want to go back again"; this in a sort of apologetic tone, the hearing of which made Windy draw the lithe figure the closer, as he answered,

"Yes, I can spare you, for I know it is right

that I should, and time will tell best whether you return or not; and now, you see, you are to leave by the end of this week as Doc wants you to start with the class at its beginning; and to think that my Sis will not only study things she should know, but drawing and painting as well — for you remember both Mrs. Raynor and our doc were very strong upon that point. And now, my young lady, do you think you can manage the trip alone? I will go a starter with you and Doc will meet you at the train when you reach her home city. It will take you three or four days; you will eat and sleep in queer places; but you are game; you can and will do it."

"Yes, I can and will," came like an echo from the strained, red lips.

A little later a lively trio canvassed the situation. Joe offered Roma a little horsehair trunk, his one treasure, as it had belonged to his dead mother, and no living soul but the girl could have been an incentive for him to part with it. She accepted it upon one condition, that he would write her and tell her of all the happenings at the Snuggly and thereabouts.

The remaining few days seemed like unreal ones to the waiting girl. The sorrow which she felt at leaving home and the boys seemed like a faraway loss, for the anticipation of going into a world — like Dr. Moulton's world — was filling and absorbing her uttermost thoughts. Roma, who was anything but a selfish girl, now felt an almost guilty

twinge at her eagerness to start. She had been upon the trails, bidding all her haunts a fond good-by, stowing up pictures in her memory of tall pines where the sun's rays seemed to linger, and where the scent of the carpeted earth was fragrance to the senses. The lakes were like oases in her mind's picture, with their mirrored depths reflecting the white turrets of the stately glaciers. The royally glorious sunsets acted as a benediction to the many scenes she would carry with her into the unknown world.

And now as she stood waiting for Gypsy to be brought to the door by Joe, who had asked that he might, as it would be the last service he could perform for her for quite a spell, she felt that, as her father used to say, there are many stages for man; surely it was true also for all, and that she was leaving one to ferret out another.

The sound of horses' hoofs beating the hard ground sent the color to her cheeks and a light to her eyes, and when she sprung into her saddle, Joe, whose eyes had never left her face, exclaimed, "Well, Roma, I shall still have Gypsy to take care of, and I shall see you many times looking as you did the day long back when you informed me she was not a bit like a circus horse. But we have been good friends since then, eh, lass," Joe added, as he stepped to the side of the really unusual-looking creature, upon whose sleek back Roma was seated as she gazed down at him.

"Yes, indeed, Joey; we sure have and shall be

again. Remember those letters and take good care of my beauty,"—here the little brown hand found a resting place upon the broad shoulders of the lad and a face leaned lower and closer to his while a tender cadence came into the clear voice, as she added, "and my Broth."

"Well, Sis, you are as spry as a cricket this morning to be sure." Here Windy, looking the veritable guide, appeared, while Joe clasped the hand that had found a ready companion as the words, "Never fear," answered her request.

It was only the work of a moment to lift the small horsehair trunk upon Glossy's back and fasten it to its strappings. Joe insisted upon playing porter, keeping up a lively conflagration while—but quite a different face did his present when the last gleams of scarlet failed to glint back at him from the swaying figure upon the circus horse. He turned—alone—and entered the Snuggly, which nestled under its pines.

CHAPTER XV

Down, down the trail the lad and his idolized Sis took their way, and if Roma ever and anon clasped her arms around the neck of her four-footed friend and whispered words of endearment into her listening ear, who could blame her? — they had been such loyal friends so long, these two.

One of our greatest artists always believed that dumb creatures had an immortal soul, so to this girl of nature similar thoughts often presented themselves. To Windy, she was the bright, animated, little traveler, asking many questions, the answers of which he was as much in ignorance as herself. She was feeling a little troubled about going to bed in the queer-looking bunk Broth said she would have to do, but thought it would be fine fun to eat at little tables for so many meals, "And you see, Broth, I shall not have to do even one bit of the cooking myself."

Many little veins of thoughtfulness crept into both their minds, but by much tact were spanned over until the lengthy ride had been completed and the great iron monster actually hove in sight. They had both alighted from the backs of the ponies and had left them with a lad at some little distance from the station, as hissing and puffing

were not familiar sounds to their unaccustomed ears.

Now it was the wrench came, how keen none could say except those who have passed through a similar ordeal. But brave must be the one word used to cover the scene, for as Windy, after putting his Sis into the care of the kind-hearted conductor, bidding him take good care of the girl, turned to say good-by, the face of each had a tenseness very foreign to their usual expression. Still not a sob from either, but the eyes of the lad seemed riveted to the face of his companion until these words almost unconsciously came from her lips, wrung from her by the searching of his glance, "Why, Broth, you will see me again, and it will not be so long."

The answer, "Why, to be sure," was a plucky trial for success.

Louder puffing and general commotion warned Windy, and after a succession of smacks, which he left upon forehead, cheek and lips of his Sis, he left the train. The porter, who had been a partial witness to the scene, here asked Roma if she would not like to stand where she could see as they left the station, and at her saying she should very much, he took her through the train until the observation car was reached — the girl beginning already to be almost dazed as they passed through room after room, as she felt them to be — until at the end of their walk she espied Gypsy, and in another second her Broth was again in her vision,

he following outside at a word from the porter. A grateful little laugh was quite payment enough for the porter, while the shrill whistle and the answering neigh from the unusual-looking horse that stood at some distance diligently pawing the earth as if questioning her right to be left in the lurch, brought a semblance of mist to the eyes of the lad who was soon to return to the hills with one riderless pony.

Seating herself in one of the chairs while the porter kept watch over her, Roma's waving, waving was borne beyond sight, her last glimpse being the snow-capped peaks above God's shrine, while the scarlet of her ribbon mixed with the whiteness of her little individual flag she sent as signal back until it could be seen no more.

Then, with a long sigh, wholly unconscious of its extreme pathos, Roma put the little white signal back in her pocket and glancing up into the face of the porter exclaimed, "May I stay here for a little?"

"You sure may, Miss, if you will promise not to move until I come for you. You see, this monster, the train I mean, Miss, goes mighty fast and you know your brother gave me my instructions" (and he might also have added a neat little sum as well) "to watch over you."

It was rather unusual that no one but the girl occupied the observation end, but it was rather late in the season and some who had passed through before did not feel disposed to leave their com-

fortable lounging chairs. To the girl sitting there in the solitude nothing could have been more pleasing. Her thoughts at times were earnest, almost sad, then through her mentality would leap visions of people — life and a world — the world of Dr. Moulton, until the grandeur and beauties through which she was passing became so pronounced that she could only think of them and their Creator.

Roma, who had an artistic temperament far beyond the average, was in great ecstasy at the coloring of the foliage — the visions of the cascades and the wonderment of the Pass. How it could have been possible for any one to cut a pathway for humanity so that they might enjoy such scenes of nature as those through which she was being carried was to her a great wonderment.

The next days passed in a sort of trance in which the customs of the trip were learned, some enjoyed, but all rather tiring the girl as her sense of self-consciousness caused her temporary uneasiness. Day dreams occupied much of her time for she had determined to study and improve so that she might some day be of the world — the world of the kind woman who had drawn from her a longing to be something she was not. And now in a very few hours she would see that face that had left such an impression, as it had filled her with a wish for something she had never before known. In her day dreams just a tinge of loneliness had crept in, in spite of the novelty of her position, and the

glamour of the picture of herself she had almost unconsciously painted.

The desolate waste of the wheat fields had been like a different world to her. She missed the towering, subdued strength of the mountains; in fact, felt in her own poor little frame the need and companionship of them to guide her on her way. If Roma had ever thought about the wheat plains it was only in a vague sort of way. At first as the train rolled into their midst, after the mountains had seemed to leap from themselves, she experienced only a sense of surprise that any condition could be otherwise than grand, exalting; but as the hours rolled on and the waste spread before her limitless, she began to feel a sense of loss, until she acknowledged to herself that she was beginning to feel homesick for her boys and for the lofty peaks.

She had met a number of tourists, but none like the dear one she was on her way to see.

"And now, my little lady, we have only an hour, if all goes as it should, before we reach your destination. I shall be very sorry to part from you, for I have sort of seen the world over again with your fresh appreciative eyes, although the wheat plains were not your choice, eh — well, you see all are not lucky enough to live among mountains and the pines."

"No, that is what I have been thinking; but I am very glad I was a lucky one."

"Perhaps now when you come back with me, as

I hope it may be on my run, you will have grown to like the gay city so well you will have forgotten all about your tall sentinels back up the trail."

"Ah, no," exclaimed Roma; "that could never be, for they have always been friends to me and I am true to my friends."

"I can well believe that," returned her companion, "and now when I go back again into the land of the pines, I will sometimes see that good brother of yours and I shall tell him what a plucky sister he has."

That night as a train pulled into a great Eastern station more than one person looked with keen interest at a young girl, unmistakably Western from the soft felt hat placed so gracefully carelessly upon her head to the high shoes which reached well up to the lithe limbs, there to be met by a frock of dark brown, while the scarlet which leant itself to the picture was like a flashing smile as it scintillated here and anon as the wearer hastened to the outstretched arms waiting to receive her.

If Elanore Moulton had felt a tenderness for the mountain lass, she keenly yearned to aid in every way this girl Roma, and as they stood heart to heart they both realized the magnetism which so often permeates from one to another, making ties strong as life itself. Much questioning followed, for Dr. Moulton could see that excitement was being held with rigid hands by the lass, and she felt it much wiser to find an outlet.

Windy and Joe and even Ben received their due amount of mention, and from one with eyes which shone like the stars over her native wood. The little horsehair trunk was duly found and Ben well praised for his great thoughtfulness. Suddenly the words, "Roma, tell me, child, that you are glad to see me, for to me it is good for you to be here."

For answer, a cold fluttering hand pressed itself to Dr. Moulton's cheek, as Roma said, "Oh, yes, I too say it is good to be here."

The ride through the busy streets was like a fairy tale to the mountaineer, and once as Dr. Moulton put her arm about the slender figure sitting beside her she felt the tremor that was swaying her, and once she heard the words—"her world"—as they came in dazed manner from the tense lips.

Dr. Moulton explained many things as they neared her home, for Roma was to spend a week with her, as her assumed guardian knew full well the many articles her protégé would need to be simply presentable. "But for my part," she afterward told her mother, "I would like nothing better than to see my little mountain girl garbed in her usual dress and as I first beheld her at the height of the trail."

"She certainly is most picturesque, and I do not wonder she held your fancy for she is lovely. But, of course, her native costume must be put away for it would simply be impossible to have her so

continue to dress even as it is part of her personality."

To Roma she seemed to be walking, talking and breathing in an atmosphere which breathed back at her these words continually "her world," her world, and the very companionship of the assertion gave her courage so that she naturally assumed an ease wonderful to behold.

At dinner she gave such a graphic description of the loveliness of the route until the reaching of the wheat prairies, then she exclaimed with much warmth that "surely God made them just before reaching the mountains so that one could not but see the wonderment of it all."

"Yes, dear, I think you are right, and I only wish Allyn could have heard you say that," exclaimed Elanore Moulton.

The next few days were busy ones for both Roma and Dr. Moulton, for a seamstress had been engaged and many new accessories were turned out from cloth, muslin and lace to the gratification of all. Roma had been viewed and interviewed by Betsy, who pronounced her a nice little critter, but she could not quite understand why her clothes made her seem so like a boy, adding, "She supposed it was those flannel blouses and low collars she wore, not to say anything of a hat without even a posy or feather stuck in it."

"My, but how Miss Roma do love fire color," Betsy exclaimed to Mrs. Moulton one day as she stood and feasted her eyes upon the girlish figure,

as she made her appearance at dinner in one of the new creations. It was simply a dress of cream serge, but made in such different fashion from her usual habiliment, a bit of lace only being used at neck and sleeves, as Dr. Moulton had planned to keep it all in white. Pleased as Roma had been with it, a look had crept into her face when it had been tried on for the last time and pronounced finished, that had brought the words, "What is it, Roma; you have some wish, for I see it in your face?"

"Oh, did I show it? I did not mean to, but, Dr. Moulton, it was that I missed my sunset color."

"You funny child, but you shall have it." So instead of a lass in demure white, a girl with scarlet-encircled waist, together with flowing tie of the same hue at the finish of the low lace collar, stood smiling under Betsy's scrutiny.

"Yes, Betsy, it is the color of our sunset-kissed hills and was the one my dada liked so well, and I too love it, oh so dearly, my gleam of scarlet."

"Well, Miss, it sure is highly becoming," and Betsy's face looked the admiration she felt. So that from that time on the little mountain girl was, as heretofore, always accompanied by her touch of scarlet.

The days passed so rapidly that Roma could scarcely believe the truth, that her week had ended and that on the morrow she would meet with girls — girls with whom she would live and know. She would have so liked to remain with her dear, dear

doctor but knew that was not to be, but she would study and learn and some day she would really and truly be of her world, for now even more than ever did Roma feel a something that filled the life of her dear benefactress, which she did not possess.

Broth had been written to, but the girl felt what a poor, sorry-looking letter it was. Still, if love deep and ardent could make it worth sending, it was surely safe in the Snuggly ere this, for Roma had not delayed in telling her brother the wonderment of her trip as soon as she reached the charming home of her benefactress.

Many times during the past few days had she been in spirit with her boys and once she had dreamed that she was again in the saddle, and that the fresh mountain air was filling her senses with ecstasy. In the morning when she remembered her dream she felt momentarily a sense of loneliness but her new life was so bright it soon effaced the shadow. She was, however, very glad when upon seeking her room that had been made to look so homelike, she could behold Broth's pictured face looking at her and see the ponies and the Snuggly, as Dr. Moulton had succeeded in getting many good likenesses when upon her trip the previous year.

CHAPTER XVI

Once more the holiday season was reigning over the land, while the spirit that no other time in the whole year can bring prevailed. The girls, real girls, of whom Roma was now one, showed it in all their being, even their lessons for the time were not pursued as diligently as at other periods.

Roma had been one with these girls some weeks now and had become a general favorite. She was so different, one of them had remarked, and she did not seem to try and hide it — why, when some one asked her where she had been to school, she simply said, "Nowhere," in such an honest way that even the girls who were tempted to ridicule her simply appeared not to notice her confession. These same girls were afterwards her stanch friends, always ready to help her and always ready to sit at her feet while they saw with her eyes tall, snow-capped mountains, and breathed in long draughts of pine-scented air, for Roma even yet seemed to live in spirit much of the time among her native hills. Of her beloved boys and her dear Gypsy she had as yet said very little, as she felt she could not breathe her fondness for them in such a matter-of-fact atmosphere.

At first Roma felt the strangeness, the hustle

and bustle, that permeated her new life. It was in such marked contrast to the quietness of her past existence that she felt a sense of uncertainty as to the right manner of acting, but time soon altered that, until now no one was more the center of the little circles which met to discuss this plan or that than the girl upon whom a touch of scarlet always rested.

To the question put her as to the wearing of her beloved insignia, she simply had remarked that somehow it brought her nearer to her home and brother. She had applied herself most diligently to her tasks, always with the one thought held before her, "her world." She had also started with her pencil and brush while her instructor had complimented her highly upon her ability. To Roma, it was as if she had brought a friend with her — side by side to remain, to sympathize, to enjoy and feel with her — and even in her first attempt at a sketch she had made the subject teem with such a personality.

Letters from both Broth and Joe had been joyously received, while the Yuletide was to bring her something, the lads had informed her, of especial value, as her birthday was the first day of the New Year, and so the importance of the expected parcel was to be of unusual value. The lads had written that they were busy getting in ice for the chalet and that they were having cold, snapping weather; that they missed their little housekeeper, but wanted her to enjoy herself.

The day before Christmas proved to be a very busy one at the seminary. Dr. Moulton had invited her to her home for the vacation period and already Roma was anticipating her companionship with her. The girls were hurrying about, many of them preparing to take trains for distant homes, their faces glowing and radiating their suppressed anticipation. Dr. Moulton had promised to call for Roma and when the maid announced her, a face beaming and expectant greeted her.

It had been many years since a young life had been in their midst at the season's happiest, holiest day and the mother and daughter had been of one mind to make it indeed a gladsome one for her. Betsy, also, was full of schemes, and to a very secret household Roma was driven.

The plan had been for a dainty Christmas evening lunch with several of the girls as guests, while a small tree with electric decorations was to be enjoyed as the evening advanced. Christmas Day dawned clear and cold, while during the night a light fall of snow gave a tinge of purity to the scene. Outside, the shrubs were filled with chattering sparrows, looking and hoping for their share of the Christmas delicacies, while in the glowing flower-bedecked home was a spirit of good cheer, every one looking from secret corners, in expectation of the evening. One parcel alone Dr. Moulton had allowed Roma to open — this one bearing a distant postmark and which Roma knew must be from her boys.

"You see, dear," explained Elanore Moulton, "I can see the ones left behind in the Snuggly opening our box to them, so I would like kindred spirits to meet; therefore, my child, examine your little packet."

Windy and his Doc had been in communication for some time regarding Roma's united Christmas and birthday present, so that while Windy had paid for the trinket, and really selected it, Elanore Moulton had been the one who had sent the box containing several of the baubles for Windy's especial selection. And now as Roma stood there, the light caught and scintillated from a band of gold which encircled her finger — her one ornament — though not bearing her own initials upon its smooth surface, but the ones of A. E. P.

"Yes, I expect Santa has arrived at the top of the trail with his busy reindeer delivery ere this, but what can I have in this box?" for the wrappings had disclosed as much and in another second a lovely little ring with a flash of color emitting from it was before the pleased eyes of the girl.

"Oh, Dr. Moulton, is this my very own, and it must be the stone of my birth month, for that was red like a drop of blood, Broth used to tell me. How do you suppose he ever could have thought of it for me?"

A slight smile upon the doctor's face brought the girl quickly to her side, keen with appreciation, but simply to learn the truth that her benefactress

had only assisted the boys by sending them several from their own description to choose from.

“Just the same, I thank you for your share, and oh, I wish my boys were only here that I might thank them. Is it not a beauty?”—and here Roma slipped the sparkling jewel close over the one she had guarded so tenderly since the day she had beheld it gleaming out at her from the side of the trail.

CHAPTER XVII

Christmas Day in the mountains was spent in quite different fashion from the one she, whom the boys missed so keenly, had enjoyed. To be sure, their pleasure at the arrival and contents of the holiday box was great; still in a way it only accentuated the temporary loss of Roma, for they felt her missed presence but the more as they brought to sight the articles for their comfort which she and Dr. Moulton had so thoughtfully planned. Even Ben had not been forgotten, although he had not deigned to spend the holiday at the Snuggy, but rather had been making quite a time of it the last few days, and was to continue it, as it seemed, indefinitely.

Not that either Joe or Windy missed his presence, for he did not improve upon lengthy acquaintance; still as his prolonged absence always made him more sarcastic if possible than ever, the lads were not particular at his leave of absence.

How they had missed Roma, neither she could nor would ever know, for as she had enjoyed her scenes — new friends and faces so that the days had actually leaped — they, with the exception of a few lads whom they saw only now and then, were dependent upon each other for society. They both tried to keep the Snuggy as they knew Roma would

wish it, but Joe at times would almost solemnly declare it was no use. Then they would begin again, vowing that surely they would keep things in better shape. And now it was Christmas, and they were to have their dinner alone.

Joe had had a bit of good luck and laid low a buck the week previous, so that they were to have a regal repast of venison. The lads took turns at being chef, but to-day it was to be a partnership affair. The snow lay deep and silent over the trails. The pines wore their white mantle of holiday attire, as if even in the wilds nature must give homage to the Creator of all. The ponies were having a holiday most of the time and Gypsy was growing fat as a young cub, for both Windy and Joe must bring her her portion of sugar as a testimonial of their loyalty to her mistress.

And now as the aroma steamed from the platter of venison, Windy snatched his new house coat, which had been his Doc's gift to him, and donning it drew his chair to the table, shouting, "Now, Joe, get a hustle on and come and sit down while things are hot, but first we must give three cheers for one little girl and the Doc," and in a twinkling the Snuggy was resounding to the lusty call of two husky voices.

"Jolly, but I wish they were both here. Would they not do for dessert — just to see their dear faces would be as fine as one of Sis's best pies used to be — eh, Joe?" And here Windy smacked his lips as a bit of Joe's venison was tasted.

"Yes, it would be like cream in coffee, sure enough. I wonder if she has spied her trinket yet — what a trump Doctor Moulton is — and Roma loves her so well." Here Joe subsided into a quietness that not even Windy's smacks at the quality of his tidbit could rouse him.

"I say, Joe, that scarlet tie is highly becoming to your style of beauty — at any rate, Sis has her same fondness for the bright, else she would never have sent you that."

At this Joe's face lighted as to almost rival his gift, as he answered, "Yes, it is surely her color."

"Well, I say, Joe, I do not believe Ben is getting anything better than your moose; what say you?"

"As to the feed part, I cannot answer; but I'll bet a gold guinea he is not spending all his time at dining, much as he enjoys that — he likes filling his pockets too well with filthy lucre, and as he is usually lucky at the game, he has a pretty good chance of pleasing himself," returned Joe between his bites.

"Yes, he can and does have things pretty much his own way — unless you are sitting in," returned Windy. "Then, well — I wonder why you do not make him squeal more than you do — How about that?"

"Oh, what's the use? He is a queer chap, even if he is your flesh and blood — Do you know, old pal, somehow it does not seem possible that he can belong to Sis and yourself; surely the blood that runs in his veins must have a mighty large amount

of different fluid than that which courses through yours, and I for one am precious glad that cousins are not bound to be alike."

"Well, Joe, that is quite a lengthy speech for you. So you have a motive for your behavior of Ben. I did not know you had taken such pains to study him as all that," returned Windy, as he watched Joe furtively to try and discern if there was a thought or suspicion of Ben's hold over him.

"Well, at any rate, if he is sitting in a game and winning perhaps this quiet neighborhood may lose its charm for him and we will be deprived of his choice society," continued Windy, and there the matter dropped, Anderson believing that aside from the feeling of aversion that Joe had for him, there was no cause as yet for him to worry as to any disclosure upon the part of Ben.

Over their cider and nuts the theme of Roma again proved to be the one they enjoyed the most, and as Dr. Moulton wished kindred spirits to meet that day of all others, surely it was that love traveled many miles and far, but reached its destiny at last.

The rest of the winter afternoon was spent by the lads with their cob-pipes and checkers and many a hearty laugh rang through the Snuggy at the victory of one or other as the games progressed. Finally Joe, with a slap upon Windy's knee, exclaimed, "Well, old pal, I think the ponies will wonder where their Christmas dinner is coming from — I will feed and bed them to-night, as you

look so mighty comfortable. It is a sin to take off your new gift, so let me be the one hostler to-night,"—this as Windy started to rise and prepared to accompany him.

"Shucks," Windy returned, but a contented smile stole over him as, at Joe's further eagerness to have him play the gentleman, he acquiesced.

As Joe opened the outer door a gust of snow greeted him; while Windy with a loud laugh called out, "Better let me come, Joe," but the shutting of the door was his only answer, as Joe was away like a flash. Left to himself young Anderson drew a chair to the open grate where a bright piece of pine knot sputtered and hissed, and, stretching himself at full length, he prepared to enjoy his part of the gentleman.

His thoughts flew back to other Christmas evenings when his parents and little Sis had been with him, but now as always since the day when Ben had breathed that story of his father's dishonesty did Windy feel the blood fly to his face and neck at the very thought of Sis ever learning the disgrace which covered their father's name.

Suddenly he was roused by the neighing of a horse, followed by a gruff voice, and with a start he made for the door in time to see Ben tumble from his stirrups.

To the "Well—hello!" from Windy, he grunted something inaudible, and taking the end of the bridle, he tied it to a ring which hung from

one of the posts of the piazza, although it was not as speedily executed as was his wont.

It was no unusual thing for the lads to tie their ponies there in the days when the sun made glad the heart of man, but just why Ben should be doing such a thing to-night was beyond Windy's comprehension. Still, it did not take more than a glance to see that Ben was carrying quite an amount of supernatural energy, and Windy felt it far wiser not to question him too minutely just then.

Ben had several times since Sis's departure come home from his roving in quite an hilarious mood, so that Windy was not now given his initial introduction of him in such a condition.

In the next instant Ben came stalking into the "Snuggy," making anything but an Indian track as he did so, and not even shaking the mass of snow from his great buckskin coat, until he stood well within where radiated the warm glowing atmosphere. Then, stamping great streamers of whiteness, he exclaimed, in a most patronizing manner, "I say, Coz, got anything to eat? if so, trot it forth, for I am damn hungry."

Windy felt his blood quicken at Ben's insolent manner, but answered offhand: "Yes, we had a good feed to-day, and will have another bite when Joe comes in from looking after the ponies."

"Well, I want mine now, as I am going back again to join the bunch. I have had the devil's

own luck, and only came for a little bag of money to go on with. You may wait for Joe, but I want my grub now; now — do you hear?” — and here the black eyes looked with no very friendly glance toward Windy.

For a moment he felt that perhaps under the circumstances it was best to comply with his cousin's wishes, although it galled him to do so; but at that moment Ben, who evidently had just espied his new coat, exclaimed, “Well, if it ain't playing at being the gentleman — like father like son — that's as the saying goes.”

At this Windy, who had stood wondering which was the better way of getting rid of his angelic cousin, took a step toward him, while the words, “Take care, Ben, what you say; you may think you can boss me and make me a target for all your loose talk, but there is a limit to all things, and I tell you right now that I—”

“That you what?” — and here Ben half stepped, half staggered forward to meet Windy upon his own grounds. “So ho! my young cousin is very cocky, isn't he? But I wonder at your sending your pretty sister away, or did you think it for the best — as Joe is rather of a fascinating cub and as the girl was a bit of a beau —” But the rest of the remark was never uttered, for Windy, with a quick leap, had brought his fist with all the strength of his passionate anger straight between the mocking eyes of the astonished lad, and before either was fully aware of the fierceness

of the blow, Ben was lying stretched out at full length, a line of blood making a vivid showing, while his breath, which had been partly sent from his tottering body, was trying to reassert itself.

Windy, too much astonished for the moment as to the outcome of the insult, felt that perhaps he had been a bit too violent, particularly as his bawling relative was not properly himself; but as the insinuation of his remark returned with even keener force, he gave a violent kick at the sprawled figure on the floor, exclaiming, "Get up, you cur — if you can —"

At this minute the door opened, letting in the flakes of feathery snow, and also the good-natured, honest face of Joe. "So ho! I knew we had a caller as the mare was busily stamping the white ground as I came in, but I did not expect to be in at the finish of just such —" and here he bent his wondering eyes from Windy to the figure which with considerable difficulty was trying to regain a standing posture.

Ben was now considerably more sobered than a few moments before, but it still took a lift from Joe before he could hoist himself, and then not without a groan, while never a word of retaliation did he hurl at Windy, who stood with face a fit subject for a study as he witnessed the meekness that had overspread the lout whom he had silenced.

As Ben started to walk, a sharp metallic "oh," came from his lips, and voluntarily both boys felt that he was really suffering keen pain — while it

proved that in falling he had in some way sprained his hand and arm, where already the buzz and sting was beginning to assert itself. But still no word of cursing as yet fell upon the expectant ears of Windy. Suddenly, however, he spoke:

"You see, Joe, Windy and I were having a friendly bout and I sort of got the worse part of it. I shall have to do better in the future — eh, Cousin? — but now I must go and turn the beast in for the night. I intended going back to the bunch, but under the circumstances shall have to disappoint them." Here he wiped the blood from off his suave face, still with no apparent sense of anger or resentment toward his assailant.

"Well, Ben, I think you did get a little the slugging side of the fray, and I think you had better let me house the mare for you," exclaimed Joe, as a tinge of pain spread itself over Ben's face as he tried to get himself into his great coat preparatory to putting his pony up for the night.

"Oh, no — I'll not trouble" — but here a more resolute twinge caused him to utter a low curse, while he added, "Well, Joe, perhaps I shall have to ask aid of you this time," to which Joe readily complied.

Would he have done so had he known that he had been imprecated in the bout?

As the door closed upon Joe's retreating figure, he hastened to make more comfortable the intelligent brute, who thanked him by low whinnies the while — he meantime carrying on quite a conversa-

tion pro and con by himself, with the broncho as an appreciative listener.

"Now what under the heavens could those two have hit upon that caused such a fracas as that? It was no light thing, I can vouch for, as Windy is not a Johnny Bull, as a usual thing. But I must hustle and get back as they may be in for a second inning, although my friend Ben seems in a very humble mood, and the lout is evidently suffering keen pain. Much as I dislike him, like as not I can be of some use to his abused members. At any rate, I am mighty sorry it happened to-night of all others, for Windy has had quite a battle with himself all day. I tell you, the feeling of loneliness is not a feeling to crave — I can answer for that — and I have not had to part with as many dear ones as my old pal; then to have to end Christmas Day like this —"

Thus meditating, Joe reached the door of the Snuggy. On opening it, what was his complete amazement to see the two lads, the one ministering to the other as if a third party had been the perpetrator of the deed that was causing the now fully sobered Ben so much unalloyed suffering.

The truth was, Windy felt, despite the justice he had meted out to his vindictive cousin, that as Ben had referred in no way to his gross insult, it was possible for him in his recent condition not to realize its grave import; therefore, he felt it his right that to-night — Christmas night — he must make amends — for Peace on Earth had sounded

like a clarion call through his perturbed thoughts following his intense anger and he was now trying to heed the command. As for Ben — ah, who can say?

CHAPTER XVIII

One year had sped by on golden wings since the Hon. Allyn Prentice had left his home city among the flowers and passed through the region of glacier and cataract. Some months after his return he had again been brought face to face with the subject Elanore Moulton had spoken of — the Snuggly. This was as he perused a letter from his half-sister, Mrs. Raynor, in which among many bits of news she had referred to a homestead in the mountains which she together with a charming lady doctor from Philadelphia had visited while upon one of her various trips. The epistle had added that she also had met a lass — a charming child of nature — while there, who was wearing as a talisman his signet ring, and that it would have taken all the callousness of a lawyer's heart to demand the bauble from the eager, palpitating little creature, who had found it as it beckoned her to its secluded brightness.

Following, the details had been expatiated on until Allyn Prentice felt that he could see the trail with its tall, aromatic pines, the little brown hands, and the initials — his initials, A. E. P. — flashing back at him in the sheltered sunlight.

“Poor little thing; I am glad that Amelia did

not request it. It was generous of her to feign ignorance of the whole affair. But here, I am sentimentalizing — how Elanore Moulton would smile — and by Jove it is — yes, surely the same anecdote she started to relate to me and to which she referred as she bade me good luck at parting. Odd — that she and my sister should meet in this out-of-the-way region; the world is small after all. But I shall now have to drop a line and inform her that I have at least partially made the acquaintance of her maid of the ‘Snuggly.’ But this is not the place for me, for I gave Nina my word that I would drop in early at the reception she is giving to-night, and at this rate it will be anything but early before I don my togs, consequently my lady will be deeply offended — and that is a situation wholly undesirable. Well, at least she has received my orchids ere this — here’s to hoping that will appease her for my delinquency.”

At a considerably later hour the fragrance of flowers, the radiance from eyes as well as gems, the murmuring of many voices, and lastly the scintillating gleam from the blue orbs of the gloriously beautiful woman at whose side Allyn Prentice finally found himself, there waiting in expectancy the reprimand which had flashed forth at him even while she held her little court of admirers — each vying with the other for her favor. A few moments elapsed, then the soft, purring, undulating voice of Nina Wentworth addressed the Hon. Mr. Prentice.

"You will really have to pardon me but I have just promised to show Mr. Hendrick my Turkish room; so sorry but —"

"Oh, do not delay upon my account; the apartment is well worth seeing, particularly when its beauties are disclosed by such a charming guide," returned the late comer. "I quite envy Mr. Hendrick."

Here a rather tantalizing smile crept to the blue orbs where still the steely glint remained. Nina Wentworth no longer posed as a girl. She had passed the boundary line, but she did not regret it, for the fuller, more seductive beauty had germinated until she felt that she had but to wish — then conquer. This had really been the ultimatum of all her efforts until the Hon. Allyn Prentice had come before her vision. At first she had paid little or no attention to him beyond the certainty of gratifying herself that her beauty had been recognized by him, but as time advanced and no adoration was forthcoming she was not only piqued but determined when she learned that the honored criminal lawyer really had no great love for women and that he rather made his boast that no woman could bid him go and come at her beck, that she would make him retract his words. But as yet she had to admit to herself she had made very slight progress, although they had been acquainted now many months and thrown into each other's society a good bit. That he admired her soft beauty, her clinging dependency, her exquisiteness,

she intuitively felt, but what she had expected, what her beauty demanded, had been withheld; namely, his adoration, for it was a new experience for her to find in her gentleman admirers one who did not readily succumb to her charms. To Allyn Prentice this was plainly apparent; still he never for a moment allowed her to guess that he was conscious of the chagrin he caused her. To-night it had flashed, more than its wont, from the forget-me-not blue of her eyes; still he would not see.

The facts were just these: The Hon. Allyn Prentice had made his vocation his chum, his friend, and his sweetheart. He had let nothing come between, since the one had been the all sufficient. And now, even as his career was assured, the long-pent activity of his keen mind was stimulated with the same spirit of ambition, leaving no room for the frivolity of sentimentality. Marriage to him was a sort of existence that seemed like far-off music — soothing, charming, all that it should be — but there he meant to leave it.

And now before the last gleam of the violet crêpe which gracefully enveloped the subtle figure of his hostess had fully passed from his vision, Allyn Prentice had sauntered toward the smoking-room, utterly oblivious of the looks of secret amazement upon the faces of more than one in the little group that had witnessed the offhand manner of the fascinating Nina Wentworth and her tardy guest.

Once inside the room where the soft haze enveloped the figures clad in their habitual attire, Pren-

tice soon found his real self in arguing the affirmative and negative sides of a case then pending; and not until the period for retirement did he again seek his hostess.

"You see, Nina, you can scarcely depend on me as a social success, but as you are so nicely supplied with the beaux of the year I am sure you will not reprimand me; beside, if you could believe the interest in which I learned of a mountain lass in a letter I received to-night from my half-sister, when about to join you, I am sure you would not have had the heart to deprive me. And now I will say *bon nuit* — but will make amends, if you say, by a canter to-morrow."

"Very good, my right Honorable; we surely are kindred spirits when a gallop is the theme, so will be ready at four, and will keep my appointment — whether I receive any epistle teeming with interesting personality or not."

A gay smile accompanied her words, but a deeper flush than usual on her cheeks might have foretold that more than a promise for the morrow had caused the carmine. Nina Wentworth had controlled a sense of irritableness the whole evening, and only when Allyn Prentice had come to bid her good night had she allowed a sense of real pleasure to conquer her; but even this brief period was denied her, for the relating of an unseen, unknown mountain girl had come between them. Then real anger took possession of her senses and it was with difficulty she withheld a retort — lay-

ing bare her heart to him. She had never felt quite the same sensation regarding him before. It was true she had been piqued, disappointed, chagrined, but never really jealous, for the Hon. Allyn Prentice was no society Romeo. And now, foolish as she felt her thoughts to be, she could not account for them, and with a deep flush she strove to subdue her piqued mentality, bidding him *bon nuit*.

Leaving the sumptuousness of the Wentworth residence, Allyn Prentice stepped out in the full beauty of an October night in the flower-bedecked land of his California home. The perfume from great bushes of purple heliotrope was wafted to his senses as he turned to retrace his way to his own apartments. Walking and riding were favorite pastimes with the Honorable, and now lighting a cigar he bade fair to enjoy to the utmost the soft-bewitching beauty of the night. As he gazed into the dome of heaven and felt the companionship of the jeweled lights, one most brilliant seemed to hold his gaze, while a light laugh — half-sarcastic, half-mirthful — fell from his lips, for it seemed like a signet of gold from which streamed forth radiant points ending with the initials A. E. P. Now again, in fancy, he saw a slim, girlish hand, with a band of burnished gold gleaming thereon. Perhaps she, too, was gazing at the “meadows of heaven” — if so, they would gleam forth even more brightness upon her, for in the icy breath which fell from the stately glaciers the jewels in God’s firmament looked down and approved.

CHAPTER XIX

The snowy mantle of winter had again lent itself to Mother Earth, covering the beds of sleeping tulips and crocuses which ere long would assert themselves and woo the robin redbreast to his old-time haunt again. A second Yuletide had come and gone, and Roma had again sent a festive box to the mountain lads. She had spent the respite from study with a school friend, some little journey from Dr. Moulton's endeared shelter, but had first seen to sending loving tributes to her boys as well as the inmates of her benefactress' home. She was now studying with much diligence and was beginning to feel a sense of real pleasure at the returns, particularly with her pencil and brush. Then, again, she was much more like the world of Dr. Moulton's — she had heard music, music that had brought the sobs from her heart to her lips, there to battle with, else they had escaped her — music which made her long for the boyish cheek of Broth to press to her own. She had seen pictures that caught the sunbeams as they danced upon the waves — until it seemed that little crafts had been loosened to carry cheer the whole world over. She had read of the land of the jessamine, the gardenia, and the camille, until the richness of the perfume

seemed a possession of her own. Friendship true and fasting also had she found in her dear one, Elanore Moulton. Then what wonder that her pencil formed ideals and that her brush completed the problem, working out creations of love, gratitude and beauty on the canvas!

And now the crowning bit of joy was to be consummated, for she had received a letter some few days back from Broth, telling of his intention of paying his respects to Doc and herself in a few weeks. Joe had agreed to look after the ponies and as the ice crop had already been nearly gathered, Windy wrote he felt like a holiday for himself.

"You see, Sis," he had added, "a glimpse of you is particularly needed for my constitution. Then a fellow needs a bit of life now and again; so you will see me, sombrero and all, in an agreeably short time."

To be candid, it was hard to decide which was the more anxious that Broth's visit should be a success, Roma or Dr. Moulton, but between the two a gala time was assured.

"And so this is my Sis," exclaimed Windy's sonorous voice, as he picked up the graceful lithe figure of the girl as they entered the presence of the one both adored. "Why, Doc, you are a fairy godmother. I always felt that you were, and now facts prove it,"—here he lovingly lowered the figure of his Sis, to grasp the hands of Elanore Moulton, while a kiss almost with reverence saluted her cheek. "Mrs. Moulton, I am highly pleased," he

rolled forth to that lady's secret amusement. "Now, I say, you both look good to me — but only for Sis's scarlet badge" — here with an admiring look at her throat and waist — "could I really believe it was Sis. But I am more than glad you still love it, girlie, for Joe and I somehow always see you that way, and many times as the leaves sped past our faces, blown by the north wind of the past autumn, the scarlet ones would almost make us pause as if a caress — a greeting — had come from our Sis Roma."

A little suppressed chuckle at this moment caused all to turn, to find Betsy with eyes wide, showing marked approval at the words and appearance of the new-comer.

"Ah — Betsy, this is my Broth — you have heard me speak of so often."

"Well, I am blessed, Miss Betsy, if I am not glad to shake you by the hand, for I also have heard of you — and what a good soul you were," and here Windy crossed to where the now broadly smiling Betsy stood, while a mutual handshaking ensued.

"As to Miss Roma's bit of firelight," exclaimed the now thoroughly acquainted Betsy, "well may you believe we should all miss it, for it is a part of her and if it just should fade —"

"But it never will, rest assured of that," here laughingly supplied Roma.

How they enjoyed Windy — every one. He was one of the lads every one could enjoy; frank,

cheery and thoughtful, apparently most tactful; although, in reality, far from it, for his geniality sprang from an honest, boyish heart. One of the most enjoyable days, at least to Sis, was the outcome of a suggestion from Dr. Moulton that the brother and sister have a gallop. Roma had not ridden for some little time now, although she had kept it up at intervals at her benefactress' wish. Elanore Moulton had even expressed a wish that Roma should wear her sombrero and leather jacket, which were most readily donned, for Roma's will was but her dear friend's wish. Such a ride as they had — sort of civilized-like for a time — but when the outskirts were reached then sometimes side by side, their horses neck to neck, then a plunge, a sprint and a ringing laugh would float back upon the frosty air to the one taken unaware.

Then again, as the steaming flanks of their creatures rose and fell less rapidly, they spoke of the Snuggy, of Joe, and the ponies — Roma listening very quietly as Broth spoke of her own Gypsy. Of Ben very little was said, Windy never in any way baring his heart of the unrest, the dread, the almost hatred, which had been creeping over him by the daily intercourse with the irritable cousin. Then Roma, with face glowing and eyes beaming, would sing praises of their doctor, and of her love for her art, adding, "And when I come back home to my mountains I shall paint something that shall," — here a moment's hesitancy as she

thoughtfully added — "shall express my gratitude.

"You know, Broth, I shall go up the trail next summer. Oh, it will be good to see the purple lights play hide-and-seek up, down, and over my mountains, and then to feel and hear the wind through the pines. I am a little disappointed, for I hoped our dear doctor would come home with me, but she and Mrs. Moulton are planning on a European trip for the summer, so our having her with us must come some time later."

"I, too, am very sorry Doc cannot come, for I would promise to have an equestrian figure second to none in her home city could I have her under my training for a few weeks. How she laughed when I coaxed her to accompany us to-day for a gallop.

"'Ah, Windy, you are incorrigible,' she said; 'but I shall do so sometime and do you credit as well.'"

As the days passed, each one filled with surprises and entertainment for the lad, his very expression changed, not so much from the excitement of the whole affair but from the freedom of existence from the same habitation with a nature so antagonistic to his own, until one day Dr. Moulton remarked to him, as they were walking home from a social call they had made together: "Do you know, Windy, the first few days of your coming to us I almost fancied you were in some sort of

trouble. You had a kind of haunted expression to your eyes, as if you were in terror of something or some one; but of late it has disappeared. Tell me, Windy, did I read it aright? You may trust me, you know that."

"Yes, my kind friend, I do know that I can, and if you saw my troubled look it will make it but the easier for me to speak. But, Doc, you do not think Sis read me as you did? — I could not bear that she should dream of my extreme aversion to our cousin; but, Doc, it seems sometimes as if I could not stay where he is another day — no, or hour." And then followed some little detail of the life Ben had led, of his intemperance, his gambling, but never a word of the "sword" he held over and about the Snuggly.

"If it were not for Joe and the sake of keeping up our homestead, I would leave my kin there master of all he surveyed." Here Windy paused, while again there crept into the boyish face a look which added years to it.

"Yes, but why should you allow such a person to remain. I, for one, would not suffer at his expense."

"Ah! but, Doc, that is just it. You do not know as I have learned to — then again, he is our kindred — and you know blood is stronger than — well, we will say animosity. But I wish to heaven he was anything but a kin of mine. He goes at a pretty lively pace sometimes and my one hope is that it may need a livelier place for him to

circle in before long — that will indeed bring joyful respite. At any rate, now Sis is so happy, it almost makes me so too, and I pray she may always remain so.”

“Yes, Windy, we do indeed ask just that; and now, my lad, keep your courage and good will ever before you, and for you it must avail; but if at any time I can assist you in any way, do not forget I am ready.”

“Doc, you are one in a million, yes trillion,” gratefully returned young Anderson, but deep in his heart he felt guilty, for he well knew that fear and the awful dread of disgrace to his dear Sis as well as himself kept the apparently Christian-like fortitude ever before him instead of pure, simple good will.

The last few days of his stay were indeed busy ones; the theater, the stores, and, in fact, many points of interest were shown the lad, who enjoyed it hugely, almost wishing he were never to leave the fascinating city where two whom he cared so much for resided. But the last day came, and after profuse thanks to Mrs. Moulton and a goodly amount of banter with Betsy, Windy, accompanied by Dr. Moulton and Roma, who had sent many kind messages to Joe, together with tributes, made their way to the same station where nearly two years before the little mountain girl had looked with such longing eyes for a glimpse of the one who had now given the Broth such a delightful sojourn, and who now waved him a farewell as long

as she could see the boyish figure; Roma had turned weeping away, although not until Windy was too far distant to feel a united grief at the knowledge.

CHAPTER XX

Windy's visit had indeed marked an era in more than one way; for his beloved Sis — her warm loving heart had been nourished by the fellowship of him. To be sure, Roma loved Elanore Moulton with a deep affection, but her brother was so near, so dear, and she had so longed many times for his dear comradeship; and now as she strove day by day to master an art, it seemed as if some hand so freighted with love guided hers that the task was unconsciously accomplished. Mrs. Moulton had a very dear friend who had been a celebrated portrait artist in his prime, and now as an old gentleman he still loved to take to his brush, but only as a pastime. Roma had found him such a help, for at a glance he would suggest to her a point here and there that would change the whole tenor of her canvas and bring out more what she wished to convey than many an hour spent by herself could have accomplished. Then, together they talked of many a face, taking the beautiful in feature, the soulful, or gay in expression, until Roma had begun to feel the force of the masterful through his talk and friendly instruction.

One day as she sat before her easel, half dream-

ing, half wondering what she would attempt, as it was to be a voluntary lesson, she found her outline emerge into the contour of her frank-faced, boyish brother. With a half sob, half laugh, she paused, then progressed, until with the finishing of the portrait a few weeks later her brother, alive, was revealed before her.

Roma had kept it a profound secret from one and all, not even her teacher being made cognizant from whom the portrait was taken. It was a part of the school program that each pupil should exhibit at the close of the year some of her work, whether of art, music, or the drama, and Roma had decided to surprise both Dr. Moulton and her aged friend and artist, who had been the incentive of her success. As the very brother—a living, breathing brother—stood revealed, she felt that she might be allowed to pronounce it a success—still she was waiting in a fervor for the criticism of her friends; and it came.

Windy had met the fine old man, so that now when the artist again gazed into the boyish eyes which caught and held his own in such a frank challenge, he felt that indeed he had again met in the flesh a friend; while the flush that settled and remained upon her benefactress' face, together with the low spoken, "Oh, Roma," and the words, "Yes, little lady, you and I will yet have more of our heart-to-heart talks, if from their outcome such life as this can be produced," was tribute enough to the anxiously waiting artist.

And now the month of roses was sending pungent odors over the land, while the bee vied with the humming-bird in secreting the sweetest of the sweets. Roma, however, as bright and as early as her busy friends, was in the garden where the dew glittered and flashed upon the petals of crimson, amber, and pink, like precious gems upon my lady's corsage, for it was the day that would take Mrs. Moulton and her dear doctor to the ship that would bear them across the sea for a summer's sojourn. Roma had arisen early that the most fragrant of the roses should breathe their aroma for the dear ones who loved their perfume so well. And now, with basket filled to overflowing with the luscious blooms, she made her way back, meeting Betsy as she neared the house. Betsy held up her hands, while her eyes devoured both girl and roses as one, while the words, "Oh, Miss Roma, I'd like your picture; I think it would please the doctor 'long her excursion of the summer more even than her joy at the sight of the morning roses. Lor', but we will miss them sure enough; but I am mighty glad you are going to stay here — leastwise most of the summer."

"Yes, Betsy, I shall remain here, as I wish to finish my last year, and Dr. Moulton has promised, when she returns, to accompany me to my mountain home for a short holiday before beginning school again, if I will remain here while she is away. So, Betsy, you will have to toe the mark if I am to superintend."

"That I will, Miss Roma; but I'll manage that."

At breakfast the dewy roses breathed a benediction, and later, when the great ship left her moorings, the fragrance of them brought a loved face before the vision of the two ladies, who stood with blossoms of crimson and white clasped in their hands as they looked at the throng of beings who watched loved ones depart from their native land. They had bade Roma a tender good-by many miles from the scene of the present bustle, and when the moment really came for the separation, both Roma and Elanore Moulton realized that the parting from real friends was keen indeed.

Dr. Moulton was very desirous of studying in some of the hospitals of the older world, and had finally prevailed upon her mother to accompany her. Some few weeks before she had received a letter from Allyn Prentice in which he had dwelt in quite a lengthy paragraph of "A Snuggy."

. . . "The same one I now realize that you tried to interest me in and which, if you can believe it, I have found my mind wandering to now and again since I learned from my sister and your traveling companion of the mountain trip and of the charming child of nature you found there. It may mean that I shall some day take the trail up, up to the Snuggy, just to see with my own eyes the inmates of such a remarkable home."

He had made no mention of the shining band — possibly Mrs. Raynor had not related the inci-

dent to him, and, if she had, he evidently considered it too trivial or childish an episode to mention. How surprised he would be to learn that the child of nature, as he had called Roma, had developed into a quite conventional city girl.

Mrs. Raynor had only lately learned of Roma's present abode as she and Mr. Raynor had been traveling extensively and had not kept in touch of late with Dr. Moulton, and only within a few days before sailing had Elanore Moulton carried out her idea of sending a photograph of Roma to the famous lawyer. She had asked the girl if she were willing it should be forwarded to a friend of hers who lived in the land of flowers, and upon Roma's acquiescence she had asked her to choose the one she liked best from several positions that had been taken of her. Strangely enough, she had selected the one that showed herself garbed in the costume of the mountain lass: in homespun dress, the half-fitting blouse with throat bared, the strong but well molded hands and arms showing to best advantage, the soft hat, half disclosing, half revealing, the wealth of silky hair, which, with all the figure so lithe, the expression so trustful, completed a photograph of unusual detail.

Dr. Moulton had half hoped, half expected, Roma would choose this very one, as she had heard her remark, several times when speaking of the photographs that "the other styles taken in the more conventional dress were not as yet real, for she had not arrived at the state of just what they

would lead one to imagine of her; while, as to the other, she knew she had been true to herself as she had then been as,"— Dr. Moulton had added — "a child of nature."

"And now, Roma, will you sign that *nom de plume* under your pictured self for me?"

Thus it was that Roma, the mountain lass, was sent to the land of perfume and flowers, there to hold sway in a semi-conscious state over a clever man's heart.

Allyn Prentice was a very busy man; it seemed many nights as he let himself into his luxurious apartment that he should simply have to take a short holiday, for he admitted to himself that in truth he was feeling fagged. He had been working upon several very bothersome cases and they had in a way gotten on his nerves. One night he had returned, feeling more ill at ease than usual, to find a packet marked "Open with Care," placed upon his desk.

"Hello, what friend from the East has lost a thought upon me? I believe it is my old chum's sister's chirography — and, yes — well, it was marked open with care, for to mar —" and here the stern criminal lawyer's face positively beamed as he simply devoured the pictured girl before him.

"So ho! this is my little friend of the mountain, the trail, and the Snuggly! Jolly, and if she has not on the talisman — our talisman — veritably she is well named, a child of nature, and still," — here he looked long at the well-molded features, the

clear gaze of the girlish face,—“ you are like what I pictured, and yet — even as you are a child, still close following is the woman, with your thoughtful brow. But how did Dr. Moulton come by such a well-taken photograph way up in the wilds? She must have taken the child to a near-by — but no, that could not be. It was likely developed and enlarged from some kodak picture. At any rate, it is to be a little mascot for me, and it shall have the finest frame I can find for it to-morrow. To think that we should both have worn that signet A. E. P.!”

Thus saying, the celebrated Honorable, who had entered his library earlier in the evening a tired, bored man, now actually exhibited marked sprightliness in his step as he crossed to the mantel where stood a bouquet of cape jessamine, and there stood his new trophy by the side of the beautiful white blossoms, again promising that only for to-night should it remain without a sheltered place to resort to, while, as he turned to his desk to resume studying, the eyes of the girl seem to follow him, as if to say, “ Yes, I have come all the way from my mountains to your land of flowers.”

CHAPTER XXI

Busy days followed upon Windy's return. The chalet was rapidly filling with tourists, and both Joe and himself had plenty of employment guiding parties up the trails. The ponies were free, and seemed to enjoy the excitement of coming as near as it seemed expedient to the side of the mountainous pass, sometimes to the worriment of the equestrians until reassured by the guide, nor could any question the mind of the Supreme One who guided the feet of the little creatures and gave them the keenest instinct and intuition. Windy returned with a great deal of enthusiasm relative to city life, and many a picture he drew for the delectation of Joe. Ben also seemed unusually interested in drawing him out, adding, now and again, that "city life was the only life, for it was ever presenting opportunities for wealth and position," until one day, when he was expatiating more than usual as to the city's possibilities, Joe surprised them all by suddenly exclaiming: "Well, Ben, I am blessed if I can see why you stay here, then. I would not if I felt that away about it, for it seems to me you might like your share of the city's spoils, if they are to be had as surely as you say."

"Well, that may come all in good time; at pres-

ent I enjoy the life here in the mountains, to say nothing of my dear cousin's and your own companionship," returned Ben. But there was an inflection in his tone as he spoke of Windy that was more like the tone he had used the night many weeks back when he had hied to his bed instead of joining his cronies.

Windy felt it, but upon glancing at his burly kinsman, found his face perfectly nonchalant as well as his manner. A little later, while still speaking of the city life, Ben added, "Like as not Windy here will be the one to vamoose, as he is so taken with the gay life."

Some few days later Ben remarked at the supper table that a friend of a member of the bunch that he chummed with had dropped in from California and he would like to have him over for an evening if the boys were agreeable, as he was a deuced fine fellow. He did prove to be a most interesting and entertaining youth and both the lads really enjoyed him. He seemed to take quite a fancy to Windy from the first, and as the weeks sped by he found his way many times to the Snuggly under one pretense or other. He was about the age of the lads, although he seemed much older, and it was evident from the first that he had come in contact with many phases of the world's life, for he had anecdotes for one and all occasions and was really a comedian of no common sort. He had at one visit suggested to the lads that they all set in for a game, but as Ben was one of the company Joe

had refused under the pretense of headache, and from that time Ned Brigham never referred to it again. But many times and long did he sit in when with the gang, of whom Ben was the strong point, while it was at Ben's suggestion (on the side) that determined him never again to ask the lads to take a hand.

Ben had confided in Ned to the extent that the lad never doubted but that Windy was the one that he was trying to shield by not rousing his passion for the game. Of Joe's unusual keenness of the manner of the players — his intuition as to their bluffing and his consequent big luck — Ben never spoke, nor did Ned dream that Joe refused to make one while Ben was of the number simply because he did not care to make any scenes when the oily, suave, sly city cousin was of the bunch.

Ned had been employed in several hotels since he had started out to earn his own livelihood, and had come to the mountains with the intention of seeking work in one of the scattered hotels which nested like oases amid the mountainous region. His home was in California, where he was to return, seeking the sunny clime when the mountains ceased to entice the traveler to their grandeur because of their too icy breath. A sort of rolling stone he had always been, wishing to know what his country was like; he had consequently become a roamer, going hither and thither, acquiring the good and bad as they were brought to bear upon him, until he had become a creature of impulse,

swayed by thoughts, himself his most dread enemy. Pitilessly it bound him as with iron bands. Bound him because he could be swayed by the will of others to whom he felt a sense of fear, remorse or other of the dread elements which were fighting to control his character.

And now the summer days lingered up in the mountainous land, where the brilliant regal sunsets mellowed into the afterglow, then seemed to steal far into the perfumed night to meet the tinted morn. But the beauty seemed to be overlooked, at least by the gang of which Ben and Ned called themselves a part — for as with the warmth they seemed to spend even more time than before over their game — until Ned found that he was a loser of no small amount and that to Ben he was a debtor. Ned had almost from the first been no match for Ben, but at each gathering Ben had strongly urged him to continue to sit in, adding always in an undertone that “none of the bunch know of your loss and your luck is bound to change.”

So night after night Ned braced up and played, sometimes having a spell of better success, but even so, making him indebted to Ben for a sum that made his pulses beat at a rapid pace. At first Ben had only laughed at the lad as he had bemoaned his fate, telling him that it would all end in his being the winner, but of late he had not been quite as affable and had even asked for a considerable amount of the indebtedness of which Ned did

not possess. It was now Ned's turn to at least feign the optimistical spirit and tell Ben he would yet win and pay him. But the pessimist was becoming very apparent in Ben's manner, for he did not urge Ned any more, but exclaimed to him one night when he was about to join the gang that if he did the proper thing it would be to "pay up" before he got in any deeper. From that evening he had been anything but cordial to Ned, nor did he make it possible for him to join the game again.

Windy and Joe were very busy these days and saw but little of Ben, for they were away the entire day and Ben the night. One day, as Windy was leaving the chalet after guiding a party of tourists up the trail, one of the Jap bellboys handed him a letter addressed to Ned and in broken English asked him to give it him. That he did, riding over where the little settlement was located and calling upon Ned, who on opening his letter seemed much gratified that he was to have work at the chalet, at which he had applied, when shortly on his arrival at the mountains some weeks previous. He told Windy of his good luck, adding, "Thank fortune, for now I can begin to square myself." More he did not say, nor did Windy seek to learn.

From this time on Ned and Windy saw a great deal of each other and rarely a day passed without their having a short chat, for Ned began his duties at once at the chalet and grew to be quite a

favorite, while Windy continued to act as guide, meeting many kind tourists as he piloted them to view wonders and beauties which lay concealed beneath the snow-capped mountains and stately glaciers.

Back in the East the perfumed days of June gave place to the sultry heat of the advanced summer months, and Roma spent the time partly in study, partly as a holiday. Long letters she wrote her boys and the dear travelers. Grateful and entertained was she by the breezy, newsy ones she received from the land of sunny skies, and then again of snow-clad peaks, which sent her thoughts back to her own mountains. Roma's letters were quite different from the poor little attempts she formerly sent to her boys — now they breathed of thoughts gleaned from her intimacy with beautiful pictures, many of which teemed with lives which expressed nobility of mind, and which instinctively appealed to the girl; music with its stories — the nature and period — of which she wrote her lads, until they grew to see the beauties with her eyes, and to almost hear as did she the strains of the inspiring melody. She still sketched and painted with her aged instructor, and many a morning found them in the dewy garden both hard at work, while sometimes it would need Betsy's sonorous voice to resound almost at their ears to bring them to a sense of the realization that even the inner man demands some attention. Betsy had been very happy at having the girl with her and many

a little surprised delicacy she placed before Roma as a token of her good will.

While visiting one of her school girl friends she had attended a play taken from one of Dickens' works, and since her return she had enjoyed bringing out upon her canvas the likeness of some of the characters, as she felt them to be, to the amazement and wonderment of her kind instructor and friend. In such manner the summer glided away and the time grew near for the reopening of the seminary. Roma was looking forward with the utmost zeal to the visit she intended making to the beloved Snuggy, accompanied by her dear doctor, before her return to finish another year of knowledge, which would plant her a little firmer in the world of her benefactress.

Man but proposes, still God is always true to the helm. A letter came one day bearing a foreign postmark, which brought for the time a bitter disappointment to the girl, whose heart yearned for her dear ones. Dr. Moulton had deemed it best and wise to remain the entire winter. She was deeply interested in her studies and was gaining in her pursuit rapidly — her mother was happy — very well and contented, so that she felt it was a golden period for her to remain.

"Roma child," the letter continued, "I know, dearie, you will sorely grieve at what I am going to say to you, but I am sure you will be glad to obey me. I would rather you would not go to your home in the mountains until my return — be-

lieve me, it will be the better way. I am sorry to ask this of you, but I feel it is right; and as you are so brave I know that you will overcome your disappointment without prolonged grief — particularly as I feel it is for your good.”

And brave she was — her letter to her boys was honest and cheerful, telling them that Doctor Moulton wished her to remain East until the spring, as she felt it would be better in the end, and that while she was hungry to come she wished to please her dear lady and she felt that she knew; “and I shall have to sketch my Gypsy,” she wrote, “just for her company.”

A brave reply came from Windy some few days later, telling her that much as they should miss her expected visit, they felt that if the Doc had wished it otherwise it was surely for the best — “For, Sis, — she, we know, is all right.”

And one morning, almost before the busy world was astir, when Betsy first put her head out of the window for a breath of the soft summer air, she caught a glimpse which caused her nearly to lose her balance and land upon the clump of lilac bushes which grew beneath her window, with the words, “Well of all things, if there does not go firelight to meet the daylight.” For Roma had given herself a treat, to offset her disappointment, in the form of an early morning canter, donning her mountain togs, while the scarlet kerchief floated back a silent salute to Betsy. To the woods — the dewy summer-scented woods — she went, her eyes

lighting, her lips thanking the Creator of all for the beauty of the scene. In a luxuriant library in California the same girlish face and figure nestled in a heavy silver frame, where often a bouquet of rarest blossoms was placed beside her.

CHAPTER XXII

The gay season was beginning to assert itself along the turquoise Pacific — the hotels at the different sojourns were rapidly filling with guests who came, many of them laden with trunks and hat-boxes, for fashion ran riot at this season of the year. At some of the hostelrys the approach was made by passing avenues of calla lilies, while at others the *Bougainvillæa* clambered with its purple blooms, making a most delicate scene as it fell in graceful streamers from its tinted height to the velvety green sward beneath. The graceful pepper trees scattered here and there together with the flowered mission tree with its pure white, bell-shaped flowers only added a tithe to the beauty of the wealth of nature's bounty.

Nina Wentworth, who had just returned from her morning's ride of miles beside the flashing, surging ocean, felt that it was indeed a happy stroke of fortune which allowed her to spend glorious weeks again and again at the luxuriant resorts of this beautiful region. Her home had always been in the sunny State of California where she had lived and developed like a tropical plant — loving the warmth, the fragrance, and the beautiful in nature. It had seemed to her that her every wish

had been gratified until the Hon. Allyn Prentice had come into her life, and from then on to the present time there had been a sense of unrest.

Nina Wentworth had always been a fickle, thoughtless sort of girl, and now as a woman the deeper things of life wearied her, until she found that the only thing she really cared for was the one she had not as yet succeeded in gaining—the adoration of Allyn Prentice.

She had tried many arts upon him, but they seem to rebound to herself again with nothing but failure to recompense her. But now he had promised to run down and give himself a bit of a holiday, while she had already planned many a delight and surprise for his timely sojourn. She felt that, thrown together as much as they were sure to be from their very nearness, her hope and ambition might and would be achieved, namely, to become his affianced wife. Pride, the ruling element in her life, would then be throned, for to be the wife of the Hon. Allyn Prentice was to climb the topmost round of the social ladder. That she might be the woman who could and would supply the love, tenderness, disinterestedness in all that pertained to his happiness and welfare, she did not give thought nor special wish, only in the way of gratifying her own pleasure as the outcome of her desire and vanity. She felt that much had been gained, for never before had he consented to join her, and she felt that possession would be hers. Well, at least, she would simply have to wait and see.

"I will confess that I never enjoyed a ride more," exclaimed the right Honorable, as he sprang from his saddle and hastened to assist his companion to alight. "It was like nectar from the gods. Why, even the seals seemed to bark joyously for us this glorious morning, and, as for the roses, the Goddess Flora must indeed have been in rapture."

"Ho, ho, that was a very pretty speech. Suppose you use some such metaphor in the court-room at some later date. I am sure you would be rechristened the poetic, criminal lawyer, instead of the indomitable," laughingly returned his companion, as she buried her face in a huge bouquet of roses still with great pearly drops of dew nestling in their depths. "But now we must hasten or breakfast will be but a sigh of the morning. I will join you speedily."

At this moment a lad hastened forward to lead the horses away. His eyes were meanwhile very busy while doing so, while the words, "Yes, she is a better looker than the Doc, but, jingo — me for the Doc. Gad! but I would like to see her and Sis, but then I am seeing the country and that is worth something," were scarcely audible.

During this little communion with himself a hand was slapped on his shoulder and who but Ned Brigham should greet him.

"I say, Windy, how goes it? What were you mumbling just now? Are you in raptures over the Right Honorable and his fiancée? Ha, ha!

Well, I don't wonder — they are a pretty swell pair. So they have given you a new job, hey? I thought you were bellboy for the south wing."

"Yes, that is my real vocation and location," returned Windy, *sotto voce*, "but one of the lads here at the stable is ill and I am helping out for a bit. You see, it seems like old times — the ponies, I mean."

"Of course, but I wonder how they all are up in the frigid zone to-day — at the same old game, I suppose — Cousin Ben and all. By the way, old man, tell me, you have never been sorry you came back with me, have you? A little later I have something I want to tell you, but I haven't the time just now," and here Ned looked a bit embarrassed.

But the ring in Windy's voice as he exclaimed, "Never lose any thoughts at my expense, Ned, for, to speak the truth, I was in a state wishing for transportation. You see sometimes two is a company and three are — well, just one too many. Then again I was bound to see some of my world — and how better than by accompanying you to this sunny, flowered land?"

"Good, my friend; I am mighty glad you feel that way about it. For, well, that is part of my story. But so long for now, you will be back at the bellhop job again soon I suppose, then I shall see you more often," — and so saying Ned took himself away to attend to his duties as head bell-

boy, while Windy went whistling along, leading the proud, sleek beauties back to their stalls.

"Just how many shall you require after such a glorious constitutional," smilingly inquired Nina Wentworth, as with silver tongs she daintily poised a lump of sugar preparatory to the aromatic cup of coffee which she had deemed it a privilege to help her companion to, seated tête-à-tête at breakfast.

"Clever." Did the word form itself in his thoughts, to be transmitted to hers? It is needless to ponder, for the fact remained that the charming woman of the world employed a manner of graceful tactfulness in creating an atmosphere of homeliness and interest which enveloped him in its embrace. That she felt every move necessary for her cause he could not quite realize, for, man that he was, the many little arts studied and seemingly unconsciously assumed were to him genuine, even if at times manifestations confronted him, causing him again to admit her innate cleverness.

And now as Allyn Prentice gazed with admiration at the queenly woman — noting the delicate hands and rounded arms which seemed so well fitted to preside over the dainty accessories — the thought as of telepathy passed through his consciousness, suggesting, "Why not?"

She was indeed a most charming companion, and would grace any home and — Here a bellboy laden with mail sauntered into the breakfast room

and handed letters to the late diners. With words of apology, both were soon engrossed in their own interests. Invitations to receptions, musicals and bridge for the most part formed the topic in the daintily scented missives which Nina Wentworth opened in such approved fashion and to which she smilingly acquiesced, until interrupted by an audible, "Good for you, my friend; you are the right sort, I should say." Suddenly remembering himself, he paused and, glancing into the smiling face opposite him, Allyn Prentice hastened to divulge the contents of the letter which had drawn forth his eager, audible approval.

"You see, my dear Nina, this letter has traveled many miles and really has a partial commission for me — providing I may be turning my way East again as I was obliged to do a year ago, when I had business at the national capital. It is from the sister of my boyhood and college chum, whose home, as you remember my telling you, is in the East. At present, however, she and her mother are in Vienna where the doctor is studying."

"Yes, indeed, I remember your anecdotes relative to your friend and his near ones — and should so much enjoy meeting this clever doctor and her mother," returned his companion, evincing much enthusiasm. "But what as to the commission; can you execute it?"

"That is just the point. Can I? I am of half a mind to try." Here a half smile, fraught with much tenderness, for an instant passed over his

rather stern lips, then he continued, "You remember the picture which stands upon the mantel in my library — the one of the mountain girl in her native togs?"

"Oh, yes — the lass who has the brother and who lives in a 'snuggly'?" While here there followed a light laugh into which had crept a tinge of bitterness, though hardly decernible.

"The same; and if Elanore Moulton is a good judge, love strong as life itself breathes from the soul of this sister and brother, so that a visit to this same Snuggly is a visit of inspiration."

Nina Wentworth vouchsafed no further comment, and her companion continued, "But this Snuggly has lost its maiden, for — Oh, do not be concerned," — this as the woman with her soft, tropical beauty leaned forward, while a half expression of awe flitted across her mobile face, — "she is living and most happily situated as a partial inmate of Dr. Moulton's home. The object in her going East, the doctor writes, is to secure an education, and that she is attending a school for girls."

"How very entertaining; and how old is she, may I ask?"

"Well, really, you have me. I cannot answer that. The doctor is very interested in her, and as she is to remain abroad much longer than she at first intended, she thought, if I were to pass through her city, that she would commission me to visit her — which I should most certainly do,

but I am doubtful as to being obliged or even able to get away, particularly after the few days I stole to come here."

A slight smile crept into the eyes, whose hue was like the turquoise, taking away a trifle of the steely glint that came as of yore to their azure depths as she tactfully smiled with her lips in appreciation of Allyn Prentice's slight compliment to herself.

A little later the beauty of nature lured them again to itself while, much as Nina Wentworth enjoyed the remainder of the glorious day, and the companionship of her distinguished escort, somehow a pair of frank, wondering, girlish eyes would come into her mental picture — seemingly with no volition of her own — until she felt that a pair of truthful orbs were reading her and wondering at the plotting, scheming and yearning of her shallow heart. As for the Hon. Allyn Prentice, gazing that night into the dome of heaven as the stars one by one flashed forth, he again searched almost unconsciously for the brightness which had once seemed to radiate from them to him, bearing a united significance as from a gleaming initialed talisman.

CHAPTER XXIII

Nina Wentworth was astir the next morning almost before the birds — sleep so blest and which usually came to her so kindly, had the past night stubbornly evaded her. The few fitful lapses she had in dreamland had been haunted by a pair of truthful, searching orbs which brought even in sleep an unpleasant sense of unexplainable relationship.

As a canter of many miles was a common occurrence to her, she had upon arising determined to steal one long before the Right Honorable could even dream she had left her couch. Full well she knew the glow of cheek and sparkle to eyes she would present by so doing, rather than the slight pallor which she now noticed so overcame her.

That they had planned, as upon the preceding morning, a ride together made no difference relative to her new mode of action; she would still be in better trim for her morning's conquest.

Thinking not to ring — having donned her habit — she prepared to walk toward the stables, feeling most certain she would meet a lackey who could saddle a horse for her. She was right in her conjecture, and having bade him make ready for her canter she walked on a bit farther and

stepping into a little summer house which stood almost concealed by vines and clambering roses, there planned to await her pony.

Seating herself, she had scarcely finished expatiating upon the beauty and fragrance of the dewy roses when the voices of lads seeming at the back of the summer house roused her. Fearing it might be guests of the hotel, and not wishing to be seen, she stepped quickly behind a screen of flowered chintz which stood at one side of the arbor, which being partially secluded was used at times as a tearoom.

"How I wish Sis could just breathe this scented air! — As for a canter, she would not believe anything could be as glorious as one alongside the ocean this morning must be."

"You're right, Windy. But let's see; you will see that Sis — what's her name? Mona? Roma? now which? I forget. You see I never saw her. That dearly beloved Cousin Ben represented the family to me."

Here a humorous laugh tinged with sarcasam rang out from the lad, to be followed by one of equal sarcasm as his companion returned, "I guess we all feel pretty much the same as to Ben — even Roma cannot quite understand him."

To Nina Wentworth, the names Sis, Roma, and then Windy brought a vision — a vision of a mountain home, where love — loyal and true — prevailed; but what could this mean? What could this lad be doing so far from his own region?

With strong curiosity she peered around from her post of shelter to recognize the very lad that had led the horses away after the glorious ride Allyn Prentice and she had enjoyed the preceding morning. Strangely enough the lads continued to stand beside the arbor. Suddenly Windy's companion exclaimed:

"Well, say, Windy. You know, it has helped me a whole lot what you told me yesterday — that you were glad you had come out here to California. For, to tell you the truth, it was part of my paying up your beastly cousin (sorry to so have to call your relation) that made me coax you so strongly to come along. You see, he agreed to cancel half my poker bill due him if you accompanied me."

"So that was his game,"— here, a slight pallor spread over the boyish features, as Windy slapping his companion on the shoulder added,— "Well, Ned, it has turned out thus far all right, so what's the dif? And if by my coming I helped you pay up, I have managed to be of some good, so don't let that worry you any longer — for I am content." At this, on they strode, leaving Nina Wentworth still wondering.

Briskly as she sped through the scented morning air, the late conversation she had heard accompanied her — thoughts, queries, imaginations, all passed fleetly through her mentality — until as she approached the broad gravel path after her canter of many miles she realized the restful frame

of mind she had expected had not been acquired. However, the glow and brightness were apparent, and that must suffice, and when a little later she joined the Right Honorable for their united ride no one could have dreamed of a restless night, nor the secret she held of the proximity of a brother whose love for his Sis was enduring, loyal and true.

The next morning as Nina Wentworth passed through the long corridor on her way to the breakfast room she gave an almost perceptible start, for there in bellboy regalia stood Windy — Sis's brother. How like they were — this brother and the pictured face of his Sis, the girl Roma. "It would seem as if this girl's face was to be kept forcibly in my mental picture even to the thrusting of this lad, unknown save by myself, to continue to annoy me," half muttered, half groaned the fashionably gowned woman — whom to see was but to admire.

She alone was conscious of the many annoying thoughts which intruded as she strove to charm her distinguished companion, until he, basking in her brightness, acknowledged to her his enjoyment, and declared it one of their pleasantest tête-à-têtes.

Of one thing Nina Wentworth was most gratified to learn; that, as Sis's brother had been put back into the hotel, he was not in the wing where Allyn Prentice's room was located. "It is just as well they do not meet, for although I should not

deem it probable for the judge even to notice the likeness, still it is as well he should not be given the test. As to that Cousin Ben, it is more than likely he is desperately in love with the girl. At least I hope so."

Several days had now passed since Nina Wentworth had first learned that the bellboy who so quickly and gentlemanly executed the many commissions assigned him was none other than the lad from the mountainous Snuggy. That he was not using his own name she also had learned, for she had several times heard other of the help call him Andrews. That he was always most civil to her, she could well understand, for innate refinement was his. The evening came all too quickly when on the morrow Allyn Prentice should return to his vocation again. There was to be an especially attractive program arranged for the pleasure of the guests that night in the form of amateur talent in charades — Nina Wentworth being particularly active as one of the partakers.

In enacting the character assigned her it was deemed necessary she should wear many jewels, while she, nothing loath, felt that perhaps the very radiance which they would shed on her would bring into such clearness her beauty that the man whom she sought to charm would be under her spell.

Returning to her room the latter part of the afternoon on the day when she must appear in her most ravishing toilette, she rang, and Windy, the

spruce new bellboy, answered. Bidding him go to the clerk, she commissioned him to bring her a package from the safe which he should say she wished. He returned shortly and, after giving the usual tip, Nina Wentworth withdrew with her package into her boudoir. Seating herself before her dressing table, she soon was busily arranging, then rearranging, gems most beautiful and brilliant. Having at last decided which would produce the best effect as well as the one she was most desirous of creating, she returned the remaining glittering baubles to their cases. Then putting them into a handbag she locked it, putting the little silver key back upon the slender chain she wore about her neck. Thinking then to rest for a spell, she selected a book she was interested in, and soon was enjoying to the utmost a quiet respite. As the hour for dining drew nearer, she decided she would be served in her own apartment, thinking not to dress until she should for her character part.

That night a gloriously beautiful woman with soft clinging robe of palest yellow, displaying neck and arms of almost marble whiteness upon which gems of rare beauty flashed and scintillated, could have been seen preparing to leave the apartment which upon the register was reserved by Miss Nina Wentworth, Los Angeles, California. Glancing at the clock of Dresden standing on the dresser and which pointed to a quarter to ten, the vision of

beauty, wrapping herself in a long black satin cloak, turned and left the apartment.

The charades proved most pleasing, while Nina Wentworth as Cleopatra easily won the distinction which merited her the evening's praises. Later and when the early hours of the morrow had been ushered in that would bring to an end the holiday sojourn of the keen criminal lawyer, and he had asked the fascinating and still radiantly jeweled and gowned Cleopatra to seek the beauty and fragrance which outside was so apparent, there beside great blossoms which hung their heads so freighted with sweetness, he — Allyn Prentice — at last manifested tenderness most welcome to the modern Cleopatra.

CHAPTER XXIV

The days and weeks passed rapidly and happily for the most part with the girl Roma; still, the past year had wrought many changes in the orphaned girl. Not that she was unhappy, for that was not true, as he loved her studies and was most anxious to be one of Dr. Moulton's world when she should have returned from her prolonged sojourn.

Still, much as she was beloved by her girl friends, there was a something she longed for. Could it be the old life in the mountain home? Yes and no. There were days when it seemed she must fly there, for she needed the love and kinship of that dear Broth, her only tie of blood; but she had promised her beloved benefactress and so must abide. The very fact of the repression at times made it all the harder to obey.

Then, again, she had been working very hard at her adored work, and was bringing out most flattering results with her pencil and brush. The talent she had shown when sketching nature about her mountainous home had taken even deeper thought, until her studies of the natural, both in face and figure, were bordering upon the marvelous — such depths of feeling as she depicted not only in feature and expression but even in the poise of

her subjects. The dear old friend was in raptures, often stopping to look at her with almost reverence, after some touch from her brush would send a look of love, sorrow or even repugnance into the face upon her canvas. Then putting his hands upon her shoulder, he would turn her face to his and say, "My dear child, God has indeed given you a rare gift."

Dr. Moulton's letters began to have in them a cadence of home, and before long it would be the springtide again, and she would be perfectly happy for it would mean her friend, her dear Broth, and her visit to the Snuggly.

One day a letter postmarked California came as a great surprise to her, seeming in her brother's handwriting. Not thinking it possible, she opened it, to learn that he was seeing some of the world and that he was working his way by doing odd jobs; that he was only on a short sojourn, for as soon as he was needed in the mountains back he should go. "For you see, Sis, this summer is to be the summer for us all, as our little civilized girl is to be with us again."

Of the beauty of the flowers and trees he spoke in glowing fashion, and ended by stating that some of the ladies and gentlemen were not to be sneezed at.

The news was a great surprise to Roma; while at first a sense of worriment seized her, but after a little she began to feel pleased that her brother should have taken such a start, for she knew full

well the loneliness of the winter in the mountains. As for Joe and Ben, she knew one or the other would be obliged to remain to care for the ponies; aye, even her own Gypsy. "Joe, dear good Joe; he will remain at his post, of that I am sure. Yes, faithful Joe, you are one of God's gentlemen, although education and polish were denied you.

"Oh, how I wish I knew just where the kind friend of Dr. Moulton lives who sent me my precious gift,"—and here almost unconsciously she caressed the slender, gold cross which hung by a dainty chain about her soft full throat—"and to think of my beloved, glowing, gleaming color flashing from its one precious ruby; surely our love for the bright is identical."

In removing her hand from her unique bauble her glance rested upon the signet ring that had long adorned her finger, and instantly in an almost apologetical tone, she added, "No, little ring, I do not love it more, nor as much; for you were my first, and then again you breathe of a presence of a living creation of God's, you, with your initials A. E. P.; and wherever you are, whoever you are, my prayers are ever for your success."

As for its former owner, the Hon. Allyn Prentice, he was being carried rapidly back to Los Angeles to his life of counseling for and against crime, often in its grossest form. He had bidden the charming woman of the world a rather hasty good-by, for in some way the glamour of the evening had in a measure deserted him; per-

haps because, upon answering his early morning ring, a new bellboy had confronted him with eyes so like eyes that had looked into his from the frame which adorned his library mantel, and which almost unconsciously he had missed while on his holiday sojourn.

"Yes, Nina is charming, most charming, but," — here an acquaintance sauntered into the smoker and all thoughts of the fair Nina were turned into more matter-of-fact channels.

As for the lady in question, the word failure seemed ringing in her shell-like ears and standing out in bold relief before her eyes of tortoise hue; while with a feeling of baffled hope and pride, she sought her room.

It had been very late, or rather quite early, when she had retired to her rest of the morning, and as she had arisen very early to bid Godspeed to her departing guest, she felt that she needed a speedy rest. Preparing to refresh herself, she gave a perceptible start as she remembered her jewels, and that she had not as yet returned them to the hotel safe.

She had left the bag in her room the previous evening, having hidden it while at the charades, intending to send them all back when she should disrobe them from her figure before retiring; but as it had been a rather unseasonable hour, she had simply unlocked her hiding-place for them and dropped the glittering, scintillating jewels to join the brilliant gems.

Now, as she again unlocked her case, thinking to put them into better shape than her hurried deposit in the early morning hours, she let the wondrous things nestle in her gowned lap. Several flashing ornaments had been restored to their special nook in the protecting cases of chamois, when a sudden startled exclamation broke from her red lips. "The string of rubies, where are they? Surely I have not dropped them!" Rising in great haste, she searched, then continued to search, each moment the color fading faster from her startled face. The little clock of Dresden ticked, then ticked with mocking calmness, as the minutes passed by, all unheeded by the now thoroughly wrought up woman.

She rang for the floor maid, although she knew she had not been in the room since the appearing of the jewels, for as she had wished to attire herself, she had laughingly remarked that she would be her own maid, at least for one night. As the maid entered, Nina Wentworth, who was adroitly, busily occupied, casually remarked, "Oh, Nellie, you may make up my bed, as I may have some early callers, and would like to get the tidying through."

"Yes, very well, Miss," and the room soon began to take on a tidy look.

Meantime, Nina Wentworth watched the girl, though in tactful manner, casually remarking, "I had a real gala time last evening, as well as in the wee hours of the morning, acting as my own

maid. You, of course, did not come in, Nellie, as I asked you not to."

"Oh, no, Miss, and as you did not need me and the rest of my ladies were sort of helping each other dress for the tableaux, I asked out and stayed at my sister's over night."

"That was a nice change for you, but now, hurry a bit, for I have some important business I must attend to."

The eyes of the lad Windy, Sis's brother, were ever before her, and to think they were the eyes of a thief! Yes, it must be so, else why should he have used other than his own name, and have left his own mountainous haunts, if not to gain in some way, perhaps, who knows, so that he could give that Sis, he truly loved so deeply, trifles ever dear to a feminine heart? But to think of its being at her expense! It surely was enough that his Sis had stolen a place where she could not find entrance!

With the thought, her impatience grew, and when at last the maid informed her that she was finished, it was with an almost audible sigh she dismissed her, feeling that now indeed she must grapple with the situation.

CHAPTER XXV

"Well, puss, I will lay a red rose at thy shrine,"—thereupon the Hon. Allyn Prentice drew from his lapel a crimson velvety rose and added it to the small cluster of Cape jasmine which partially filled the slender silver vase,—“for I fear your nosegays have been sadly neglected of late.”

Somehow the previous evening when entering his luxuriant library a sense of loss or incompleteness filled him; why or how, he could not tell. But after a sort of renewed acquaintance with his possessions, including a deep glance into the truthful eyes of his girl of the Snuggy, he hastily exclaimed, “By Jove, I have it. Not a flower, not even a bud, by my little mountain lass’s picture.”

The next morning delicate sprays again found an abiding place in the slender vase to which now the crimson rose had been added, while, could the original have known, she would have declared, “Just this lovely carmine completes it.”

A busy day had Allyn Prentice put in and now as he sank into his great leather chair, drawing his drop-light to the right position, he prom-

ised himself a bit of respite. His evening paper had been partially consumed while he subconsciously was enjoying the luxury of his finely appointed room.

With a sense of annoyance he heard the telephone ring out his number and with reluctance he left the depths of his cozy chair and turned to comply with the unknown communicant. In crossing to the telephone, he passed the cluster of jasmine and its sweet fragrance was wafted to him like a caress. Seating himself, he hastily, almost irritably, picked up the receiver, while a most annoyed "Yes" resounded throughout the room.

"Allyn, is it possible that is your voice," came in sweetest tones. "I'll wager a box of bonbons you do not know who is speaking, but at least my tones are placid." Here, a silvery tinkle floated to the ear of the Right Honorable, whose face by this time showed plainly traces of surprise.

"Nina, where on earth are you at this moment? Your voice is very near me, as I believe you are."

"Right you are. I am in Los Angeles, arrived from the sea late this P. M., and am in desperate need of your skill. Can you not run over?"

If the fair Nina could have seen the expression of ennui which overspread her listener's face, she would have felt anything but flattered. Howbeit the tone in which he answered her was much improved over his hasty "yes," and really by this

time he was thoroughly roused, as he knew it must be something far out of the ordinary to take the fascinating Nina Wentworth from the fashionable hotel where she was reigning queen.

"Yes, I will have Asa brought around and will soon be with you, if you will pardon the unconventionality of my riding togs in so doing."

"That I surely will,"—and here a soft, modulated "good-by for the present" closed the spirited conversation.

Charming as ever was the woman into whose presence Allyn Prentice was ushered some little time later, and very friendly was her bearing toward him. Secretly she felt that even now the very occasion had occurred that might bring him more into her presence, and she felt that possibly success for her might yet arise, even though it brought dire suffering to a far-away one. That Windy was guilty, she felt certain; still the haunted look in his wide-open eyes as he realized that he was accused of the loss of her rubies had never left her thoughts, try as she had to obliterate it.

Rising from her dainty chair, she invited her caller to one of ease beside her, and immediately began relating the loss of her jewels. Finishing, she added:

"Now, Allyn, I have a great favor to ask of you. You see my rubies are an heirloom and are worth a small fortune for their beauty as well.

I must have them, and I want you to fight the case for me. Say you will." Here with unusual excitement, she rose and coming to him looked the entreaty she had voiced.

"My dear Nina, I am very sorry to learn of your loss and full well I remember the beautiful flashing gems which so well became you. Only this afternoon did I receive word from an out-of-town party asking my services in a case of a minor, a lad, who would be at the court-house in the morning, and whose case I agreed to conduct. Of course, if he should be one and the same, that you have accused, I shall have to defend him, as I am pledged, but where is the lad and what is his name?" intently inquired her visitor, now thoroughly interested.

"I suppose the culprit is also here in Los Angeles, by this time, as he was to come with Mr. Warner, the night clerk. As to his name, he gives it as Andrews." Here a faint flush passed the oval of Nina Wentworth's cheeks as she realized the knowledge she had gleaned relative to his real identity.

A few more questions the lawyer asked, bidding his still rather querulous hostess have no fear as it was most probable her gems would again soon encircle her white throat, bringing with them an added value by their brief loss.

Wishing her good night, he sought his coal-black horse, where under the bright starlight he

again returned to his dimly lighted apartment, his curiosity appeased, his mentality aroused to conquest for the continuance of his noted name.

Meantime, Windy, the frank, honest, loyal mountain lad, had been questioned, cross-questioned, stared at, as if he were an offspring of the Evil One, and finally held as one who knew the whereabouts of a string of rubies he vowed he had never even seen. He had been summoned to the beautiful room of Miss Wentworth, together with Mr. Warner and Mr. Ranlett, both gentlemen of importance at the hotel; Mr. Warner being the gentleman in charge of the office at night, while Mr. Ranlett was the real manager.

The instant he entered, the door closed behind him, while a perfect volley of questions was hurled at him. At first it seemed to the lad almost in the manner of a joke, a semi-serious joke, and one which he did not seem to follow; but as the moments passed, as the query, together with the scrutinizing looks, were bent upon him, he realized he was the subject of a very trying proposition. As he turned from time to time from the faces of the two gentlemen to the violet eyes of the beautiful woman, he felt that in hers lay the least sympathy for or with him. The last words she had uttered before he had left her presence had puzzled him full well, for they had given him to understand, though in a veiled manner, that she knew he had been disguising under a false name

and that she believed it had been for an evil purpose.

A still more serious talk, if possible, had followed after leaving Miss Wentworth's apartment, the two gentlemen assuring him if he would own up and produce the gems that they would stand by him and that he should never feel the hand of the law. Again and again he assured them that he was innocent, that never had he taken as much as a sou from any living creature. Still they were obdurate, although at the last, when Mr. Ranlett bade the lad good-by as he was about to start for Los Angeles, where he was to appear the following day in court, he laid his hand almost caressingly on the boy's shoulder and looking straight into the deep eyes, had exclaimed, "Gad, boy, if I don't believe in you."

All the way as the train flashed along in the fast gathering darkness, Windy Anderson's brain seemed afire, while the looks which seemed to emanate from two pairs of eyes nearly drove him to frenzy; one sending forth such distrust and almost hatred to him, which he seemed better able to bear than the sorrowful but still trusting look which welled up from the eyes so like his own, and which, thank Heaven, were far distant.

Again it seemed as if he must have Joe — big, loyal Joe — at his side; but how?

On, on, now into the deep darkness the train still bore them, until the many lights, twinkling nearer and nearer, like ever restless fireflies, as-

sured them their destiny was near. A sorry entrance into the beautiful city it proved to Windy, his heart nigh to bursting.

Little sleep came to soothe the pent-up boy. Humiliated as never before in his young life, not until the light began to peep through the windows did rest so blessed come to the weary lad. The next morning he was awakened by a voice seemingly far away for a time, and with a deep groan he aroused himself to meet the eyes of his guard whose apartment he had shared, a deeper sense of humiliation being borne on him as he realized what the advancing day held for him.

CHAPTER XXVI

Somehow the morning which found Windy Anderson, alias Andrews, so filled with chagrin and despair, that it seemed more than he could bear, found the Hon. Allyn Prentice, keen-eyed, keen-witted, criminal lawyer, with a positive curiosity to view the lad who had been accused of stealing Nina Wentworth's jewels.

That he was guilty he never for an instant doubted, but that he would divulge his guilt, as well as the hiding-place of the gems, he again never doubted.

Just why he took such special interest in the case he could not tell, except for the restoration of the heirloom and to bring pleasure to the violet eyes of a beautiful woman. Still, somehow, he did not seem to dwell as much upon Nina's peace of mind as upon the unrest of the culprit.

"Poor little devil, it will go hard with him, whether he confesses or otherwise, I am afraid. Still if he is my client I will help fight for him, as I am expected to do, and God knows the lad may be innocent, and sorely need my help. I am afraid Nina will not relish a séance in the police court this glorious morning; but my colleague, Lauren Stocton, will help in a way to appease her repug-

nance, as he is a very fascinating man, as well as an able counsel."

A good half hour before he would be obliged to present himself in the court-hoom, Allyn Prentice turned the knob leading into the anteroom of the police station to find it occupied by the clerk at the fashionable hotel at —— and a lad of depressed appearance.

Advancing, he greeted the clerk, remarking that when leaving his hotel he had not expected to meet him again so soon and was sorry that it had to come about through such unpleasant conditions. Then turning to the lad, who had risen together with Mr. Warner, he continued, "So you are the one I have to do my best for, eh? Well, let me look at you."

At this a firm white hand was placed under the astonished lad's rounded chin, while his eyes, as by some power apart from his own will, sent their frank, open gaze into the man's, standing before him.

A long, scrutinizing look was sent into Windy's eyes, seeming to draw his soul's pent-up anguish to the surface; while to Allyn Prentice's consciousness dawned a positive truth of the boy's innocence, and instead of the implied insinuation that though guilty he meant to aid him, he almost unconsciously exclaimed, as with reluctance he drew his gaze from the depths of the other's eyes, "My lad, it will take some powerful fighting from the

other side to convict you, as I am assured as to your honesty."

To the boy with his few friends and his mountainous home so far distant, the earnest words of this keen-eyed lawyer revealed more than mere interest in a case of law. It revealed a belief in him, a belief in his honesty.

When the criminal lawyer had entered the ante-room where waited Mr. Warner and Windy, the latter had been surprised into almost uttering an exclamation as he recognized at once the gentleman who had so recently been a guest at the hotel from which he had been discharged under such trying conditions.

Now again in fancy he could see this same erect figure seated upon the back of a prancing horse and by his side the very woman whose jewels he was now accused of possessing. How little he had dreamed, when after their canter had been finished, and he had led their horses away, that he would be within a few days accused of theft by one and defended by the other. And now for the first time since he had glanced into the blue eyes of the woman who had thus accused him, seeing the steely glint which seemed to envelop him, had he felt there was any real aid or friendship for him, although he realized that the two men at the hotel were most anxious to assist him. Many questions were put the lad by the man whose face inspired confidence and when a little later the woman with

the eyes of changing hues, accompanied by a gentleman of scholarly bearing, entered, Windy felt a sense of protection he had not felt when last in her presence.

It did not take Windy long to note the look of undisguised friendship, while to the observing eyes of the lad there seemed a deeper ardor to creep into the eyes of the beautiful woman as she turned her gaze to Allyn Prentice; while, as for the keen-eyed lawyer, only a sense of preoccupation seemed apparent, as he most deferentially assisted her.

Many more questions, then cross-questions, followed, and when at last the query was finished and his brother attorney vouchsafed to escort the fair Nina to her waiting carriage, it was very apparent that she desired the added escort, as well, of the lawyer for the defense, upon her brief walk. This he complied with, half hesitatingly, which was noted equally by his brother lawyer as well as by the fashionably gowned, beautiful woman, much to her secret annoyance. The thought that the lad might divulge his name, which she had withheld even from her attorney, fearing the influence, by her presence, of the girl Roma, should she learn of the bitter ordeal through which her beloved brother must pass and come to him at any cost, brought a faintness unexplainable to the woman, who had accused Windy, alias Andrews, of the theft. The feeling of intuition that she experienced, that the Hon. Allyn Prentice really believed in the lad's honesty, lent

a zest to her purpose to win her case, thus securing her precious jewels, even if it were the means of breaking the heart of a sister whose only tie was a brother, and whose home in the mountains would be no home without the love and protectorship of such a tie.

As for the brother, waiting for the reappearing of his friend, for this he felt the Hon. Allyn Prentice to be: the one thought surged through and through his half-dazed senses, how to prove his innocence, to pay back in the only way he was capable his deep gratitude to the man who trusted him. After some little longer conversation pro and con for the facts he needed, Allyn Prentice suddenly exclaimed, "And now, my lad, I am going to become responsible for you, for I believe in you. As you have no place to go for the present and Mr. Warner has to return, I want you to come home with me. What do you say?"

Poor Windy! If Nina Wentworth had vowed that his real name should be kept a secret, how much more had he? For had not his Sis, his Roma, a life before her, and what would it be if it were known that her brother was believed to be a thief? And now as Allyn Prentice's words fell on his ear his first thought had been of the homage both he and Roma owed this man, while the words which came trembling to his lips in answer were only by a superhuman effect stayed, as he returned, "Oh, Mr. Prentice, how can Ro— How can I ever repay you for your faith in me."

While to the man of the world a feeling of determination permeated him that he would indeed prove his faith in the lad to be intrinsic.

CHAPTER XXVII

How fared the two who had made the Snuggy their home through the cold bleak winter days? To Joe, they had proved long, indeed, for without the companionship of his friend there had been moments, aye, even hours, when it had seemed to him that he also must leave; leave the only home he had now known for many a year, and follow Windy out into a world of action.

As the weeks passed he realized clearer the reason of his great unrest; realized that in losing the almost constant companionship of Roma's brother, he had, as it were, parted again from her whom he now knew he so dearly loved. Ever and anon they had brought her presence to them by their keen interest in all that concerned her, and that of itself had brought infinite pleasure and peace to them both. Now with no one to quote many of her bright, interesting remarks, no one to talk to of her beauty, her thoughtfulness, her every personal attribute, the test of Joe's love was crucial.

As for Ben, he still claimed the same abode as his home, but there were weeks which elapsed and not a glimpse of him. While, when he deigned to favor the Snuggy with his presence, it was al-

ways an added test of loyalty to both Windy and his Sis, for to Joe's ears many a slurring remark would have been borne had it not been vigorously and emphatically shown from the first that such could have no entrée.

Then many times, as if reading his very thought, Ben had half-sneeringly remarked: "I say, Joe, why is it you do not take a respite like Windy. I'll wager he is having the time of his life. Now, as you have never been East and as Miss Roma is there" (here an apparently innocent glance would accompany the words, a deep tinge the while creeping to Joe's dark skin) "she would be sure to welcome you, and like as not introduce you to some of her new-found friends; while, if they did not possess too much book learning, they might be induced for novelty to become Mrs. Joe, and then when Miss Roma returns in the spring she would have a neighbor; and, who knows, between us all finding wives a real colony might be started."

To this and like remarks, Joe was constantly treated when in Ben's presence; remarks which he knew were intended to wound and humiliate, still so veiled that any outward comment would only have proved him the smaller and weaker-minded of the two. So that, while he allowed no insulting remarks to in any way menace the absent ones, the veiled insults he bore in silence; only loving the more, as he kept his loneliness and yearning to himself.

Ben still found congenial company over to the

colony, where many a new lad had been by him initiated in the game, to his deep regret.

Ben had now been staying for some little time at the Snuggy, occupying himself by mending his saddle and polishing and cleaning his several guns, as he devoted his leisure, when out of the game, to hunting. Many new skins now graced the floor and covered the walls of the mountainous home since Roma had left the unique abode; being the result of Joe's and his prowess.

It had been several weeks now since Joe had received any news from either Windy or the lass, whose letters to him were kept so carefully and read so often and tenderly. He had just returned from feeding and bedding the ponies, and still felt the contact from Gypsy's warm tongue as she caressed his hand, hoping by so doing to win still another treat of the sugar he so often allowed her.

Unconsciously his face had assumed a sadness which of late had often rested there, but of which he had no thought as to its transparent depth.

"Well, Joe, I have decided to take a trip myself, seeing you are bound to remain a fixture," exclaimed Ben, some little time later of the same evening, as he came into the den where Joe sat reading and puffing at his cob pipe.

"Well, Ben, where on earth are you headed for?" exclaimed his companion, a tone of puzzled query in his tone.

"As to just the point of the compass, I have

not as yet decided; but of one thing, it will be to a warmer clime, for upon my soul I have been shriveled up all this winter." Then, here another of his side glances rested on Joe's now interested visage, as he continued, "and I may make a lengthy spell of it; in such case, do not forget to extend my kindest regards to Miss Roma, when she visits you and her brother here in the spring. Of course, it is just possible I may see her in the East ere she leaves for her sojourn at the mountains. In such case I will extend yours to her. Eh, what say you?"

Ever the same probing from him, while to Joe it ever brought the same pang, as it revealed to him a love deep, but guarded, as he believed. Great honest creature, as he was, he was incapable of thoughts to which the crafty Ben was so accustomed, nor could he know that the ardor of his great love was so keenly apparent.

"Well, Ben, I do not see but I shall in truth keep old bachelor's hall; still something tells me it will not be for long; one or other of the flock will be with me."

The next morning, before Joe had roused from his deep sleep in which he had seemed to feel that Windy was with him and that a conversation of deep import was being discussed, he was startled by an unusual commotion, and hastily rising he looked out to see in the early gray dawn several of Ben's cronies who had evidently come to bid him good luck. Dressing hastily, he descended, to

find that although early Ben had preceded him and had about started to prepare a bit for breakfast just as his cronies had put in their appearance, he evidently not intending to rouse Joe.

Deftly Joe enlarged the bite Ben was about to serve up for his delectation, adding a rasher of bacon and a tidbit of venison, to which the now prospective traveler did ample justice.

Just as the pale rays of Old Sol came over the white-tipped pines, Joe again helped, as with Roma, then Windy, and now lastly Ben, to tie his needed belongings, this time encased in a spruce, yellow valise, to the back of the pony, who would be led back again riderless, to join Gypsy and the other creatures in their usual shelter.

Joe had also learned that one of his pals would accompany Ben, and as he watched them as they passed out of vision down the white, silent trail, thoughts as of premonition came to him, almost voicing the words, "They are not bent on any good," while following almost instantly into his consciousness seemed to float the faces of the other absent ones of the united Snuggy, ending with a sudden remembrance of his interrupted conversation with Windy from which he had been so rudely awakened in the early mistiness of the morning hours.

If the faithful lad, standing under the tall, snow besprinkled pines, could have known of the two, recently received letters, postmarked Los Angeles, California, of their cruel contents and of

the spirit of exultation which beat under the coat of fur which covered the wicked, treacherous heart of the oily Ben, he, too, would have descended the trail to speed to his old pal, there to befriend, encourage and liberate, were it in his power, one whom Ben had doubly hated and sworn to banish, since the night back in the Snuggly, when he had suffered so keenly from him, even as he knew it to be well merited chastisement. Still his sense of wounded vanity had never, as yet, been appeased.

Well might Joe wonder why no message reached him, especially from Windy. Ben might have explained the reason, had he so desired, for he had never lost track of the absent lad, and even now in the depths of his pockets were several letters addressed to Joe. Not until his diabolical scheme had been consummated, as now he well knew it had, did he breathe of his planned departure, feeling that now his nearness to the Snuggly would be most distasteful.

CHAPTER XXVIII

"Dainty Spring, blest season of the year."

"You are right, my dear Roma. Ah, well I remember when at your age the gladness and ambition which filled my being as the soft air wooed the world to creep forth from its period of seclusion; while even now a buoyancy seems to permeate my senses not felt at any other season of the year."

Roma, with her stanch friend and artist teacher, had just returned from a walk filled with intense charm to both. Many a glance of interest was vouchsafed them as they passed; their souls so filled with the beautiful in nature as to radiate charm on all about them.

"Yes, and you see, my friend, this spring is to be an especial one, for I am to see again all so dear to me, also my home in the mountains. I almost wish the days were swallows and I could wave them to fleetest flight."

Here a wistful far-away look crept into the full orbs, a pair of duller ones watching her, fascinated by her youth and anticipation, long since an almost forgotten element with him.

"Then, my dear doctor has positively promised to accompany me to the Snuggly shortly after her

return, which will be in a few little weeks. Oh, I am so glad, so glad. And I will tell you a dear secret, but you must not breathe it. Just this: I am truly lonely for my hills."

Such good fellowship as had been enjoyed between these two! Roma often felt that God was indeed caring for her through this earth comradeship and guide.

The soft, velvety pussy-willows, which the children carried so lovingly and guarded so tenderly so that their dear ones might be pleased to receive the first trophy of spring, had been followed by the sweetly perfumed arbutus, while the bluebird had come to remain.

It had been several weeks now since Roma had heard from her brother, but she reasoned to herself that he was likely on his way back to the Snuggly and that soon she must receive word. A few days after her charmed walk with her artist friend, word was given her that a gentleman was waiting in the reception room and wished to speak to her. Quickly she responded, expecting the gentleman, the one and only one — her benefactress' friend as well as her own. To her great astonishment who should rise from the chair as she entered but Ben, her Cousin Ben, looking larger and grosser than ever; while his manner, as he approached her, was more suave than she had ever before noted.

"My dear Cousin Roma, how charming you have grown! Why, really, you would almost be con-

sidered a beauty; and to think you are going to waste it all back up the trail. Gad! but I say, it is too deuced bad."

Roma, who had disengaged her hand from the apparent, desired, lengthy clasp of her cousin, flushed a deep tinge as she hastened to enquire for Joe, and if any news had been received of her brother.

Ben's answer was sort of evasive, spending as little time as possible upon the subject. His one theme seemed to be herself. Again and again he returned to her personal charm, each time in a manner which caused Roma to feel momentarily a sense of keen depression for which she failed to account.

He informed her he was East on a little holiday, should be about her city for a few days, and should be pleased if she would dine with him the following evening and they would then take in some musical.

Roma felt that she would rather not go, but remembering the words her brother had once said, when speaking of Ben, "Remember he is our coz," she accepted, though in a manner that caused a angry look to slumber in the shifting look Ben bent upon her, as, bidding her good-by, he left, promising to call early for her the following night.

Many times during the hours which elapsed between his departure and reappearance, Roma had for the first time in her life considered feigning. First she felt that she must decline, telling him

the rules of the school demanded it, but she knew a relative was allowed. Then she believed she would have a bad headache — anything, only not to be obliged to go. It was not so much her feeling of mortification, although she admitted she was not over proud of Ben for his grossness was very apparent, as it was the something she could not fathom, a something in him she had never recognized before; but again Windy's words of his kinship rang in her ears, to which she obeyed, a radiant girl meeting the cousin instead of a properly excused one, she would have wished.

The evening passed in partially pleasant manner to the girl, who, hearing in gushing remarks of her beauty at meeting her cousin, was given a respite the remaining evening relative to it, as from her manner the oily fellow felt that discretion was necessary.

A carriage was called at the close of the musical and into the night they were carried. A few moments before the lights of the large, rambling school buildings were visible, Ben, with a sudden move, drew the girl into his arms, while in a hoarse, low voice he breathed, "And now, my cousin, my enchantress, give me my kiss, for you are a fascinating little creature, my cousin."

For the instant Roma felt the same chill which had permeated her senses the day before, but which she had striven to annihilate. Now she allowed her inclination to have full sway, ending in a tone which showed the now too-familiar Ben the depths

of her nature, as that of a slumbering tigress and one safer to let alone.

Reaching the porte-cochère, she rose and passed into the house, inwardly quivering at his rudeness; outwardly carrying a poise filled with contempt and disdain, while the words she had hurled at him still rung in her ears: "Whether kith or kin, of one thing I am convinced: you are a cowardly knave!"

While the lout, the usurper, as he leaned far back after his last glance had been thrown upon the girlish figure, exclaimed: "So ho, my haughty beauty, you have won this time — but my turn will come later."

CHAPTER XXIX

Let us now return to Windy as he accompanied his newly found friend, for as such he claimed the Right Honorable — although now in his thoughts he always styled him "The Prince," instead of his dignified title, for had he not indeed been one to him! And was he not to go to his home; the Prince, himself, vouching for his appearance at the trial? What more royal act could one do? Oh, if he could only keep the whole thing from Sis! Poor Sis, it would break her heart; while cruelly unjust as it is, it would bring its disgrace just the same, unless he could prove his innocence. Why had he ever left his mountain home! Oh, for some ray of truth and right to come to him!

"Well, Andrews, here we are; my stamping ground for at least a portion of the day. Come, we will go in."

Allyn Prentice had deemed it wise to take the lad into his own custody, a divided reason influencing him; keen curiosity in regard to the lad as well as interest in the reappearing of Nina Wentworth's gem, while an unusual tinge of sympathy for the attractive youth lent itself in hospitality to him.

As Windy arose from the taxi which had whirled them so rapidly from the police station, and followed his companion into the luxuriantly furnished apartment, his feelings were divided; great waves of gratitude surged over him, to be followed by twinges of remorse for, at the mention of his assumed name, a feeling of repugnance overcame him. And he was feeling that it would be best to tell the Prince the truth about himself, when they entered the well-appointed library. At that moment the soft, cathedral chimes rang forth, and Windy's boyish eyes turned instinctively toward the sound — when, dear Heaven! What could it mean!

Fortunately for the dazed lad the Honorable Allyn Prentice had preceded him into his library, where bidding Windy make himself comfortable, he had already become engrossed in his day's mail. To Windy, his heart seemed to stop, then leap in his bosom, while with the greatest effort he sought to calm himself. Was it a trap the Prince had set for him? But no, for how could he possibly know aught of him? No one did, except Ned, and he was sure he had not divulged aught. It might be some girl whose face was identical with his Sis's; but, even then, those togs, her mountain togs? Oh, what could it mean? With almost fear Windy glanced at the man still busily engaged with his own interests, half expecting to find his eyes scrutinizingly bent on him. But, no. Then with a boldness he hardly felt, Windy walked

straight to the mantel and gave a long look into the pictured eyes of his Sis — the girl Roma — whose clear chirography, "A Child of Nature," was inscribed beneath.

How long he remained looking into that beloved face Windy could not have told. He was recalled to himself, however, by the voice of his benefactor, saying, "Well, how do you like the lass, whom I begin to style my mascot? Is she not a typical Western type in her buckskins?"

"Well, yes, that was what I was thinking," returned the lad, not daring to remove his eyes from the pictured face. "It is a fancy photo, I expect."

"By no means. The little lady is a frank, stanch bit of humanity, whose home is in the mountains. But come, now, we will have a little more talk relative to yourself."

Somehow the words implying that the frank, gladsome girl should be but a trick of the imagination, instead of a living, breathing, loving being, struck on the lawyer's heart with a feeling akin to sadness. A sense of gladness suddenly followed as he realized her true and real identity.

As for the brother, a feeling of loyalty had possessed him, bidding him shield his Sis, even to the deceptiveness of his assumed name. As for the Prince, he seemed even nearer to him than before, while a feeling of surety seemed to pass before him that his Sis would indeed prove a mascot

for him, as well as the man who should defend him.

It was a pity that Roma, far away in the East, could not have known of the importance of the letters which lay concealed in the pockets of the obnoxious Cousin Ben, as he sat and extolled upon her beauty, the while her beloved Broth was suffering the keenest humiliation. Had she even so much as known of the deep trouble her dear one was in, her woman's intuitiveness might have aided her. As for Ben, often since the night when she had repulsed him had he been on the verge of sending her an anonymous letter, acquainting her of Windy's plight, but each time something had argued that the time was not yet. He was still in the vicinity of the city where Roma lived and there he intended to remain for an indefinite time. Something might come of it, who could tell? With Roma, a restlessness she could not account for seemed to possess her. It must be it was because the time was drawing so much nearer for her to go to that mountain home, while she began to think that perhaps Broth had returned, and maybe was so busy fixing up the Snuggly and the stables that he neglected to write; else why was he so long delayed?

The March days seemed wrestling indeed; one, almost balmy, would be followed by another when the elements seemed to wish to atone for leaving

the grim, stern old winter. Roma and her school friends, however, took nature in all her moods, loving the freedom she afforded them. To-day had been the sunniest of all since the blithe Indian Summer days had passed from off the land.

The girls had planned a tramp, to gather, as they said, the aftermath of the pink and white arbutus. They had enjoyed a long walk and with a goodly amount of the perfumed flowers were returning to their dormitory, when a young man, red faced and with unkempt appearance, prepared to pass them, at the same time exclaiming, "Ah, Cousin Roma, is it indeed you!"

The suddenness of Ben's appearance was a shock to Roma, while not only did she not deign to return his salutation, but shrank away from the contact, as if he had been some evil thing. As for her companions, their questions and glances were many, to the great mortification of the girl. The gladness and cheer seemed to die from the day for her, and even with her arms linked to her dear school friends a something seemed to envelop her, a nameless dread, of some one — could it be of her Cousin Ben?

CHAPTER XXX

Several days had passed since Roma had been so suddenly and rudely accosted by her kinsman. That such a relationship existed brought to her the first humiliation she had ever known. To be sure, her Broth was not a city-bred lad, nor had she herself, when she had first joined the girls in her now-beloved school, been familiar with their ways, but neither her Broth nor herself had ever been the cause for a trace of aloofness from any as she had been subjected to the past few days.

To be sure, some of the girls seemed like their dear old selves, but even they were huddled together at times, seeming to give attention to the others who assumed an atmosphere of superiority whenever Roma joined them. At first she could not understand it. Hardly crediting the fact that a difference was creeping in, which would encircle her with its odiousness. By degrees she became conscious that a change had come in the relationship she had always borne with all her schoolmates. With the knowledge, also, came the leering face and familiar tones of Ben, as he had saluted her as Cousin Roma. Just why she should be obliged to be censured because he was her kith, she did not see; although, try as she would, the mere remembrance of his bold, suave

face brought a shameful tinge of color to her face.

A new experience befell the girl, a wondering just what she should do. Oh, if Dr. Moulton were only where she could tell her of her need! Perhaps she had best not notice it; perhaps they would soon forget the shameful fellow, as she was striving to do. Surely she would not be disregarded for others' doings.

Several days more passed, while the manner of the girls remained the same; all friendly, but bearing an aloofness which was keenly apparent. Roma felt that her heart was indeed being slowly crushed, and determined to seek the room where several of her especial little set congregated for their evening respite, and there put the matter before them in her frank, sweet manner, asking them for their loyalty to her again. She had about reached the door, through a long, partially lighted corridor, when she heard her name spoken, and by one who usually associated with her set of girls. She was about to proceed and announce herself, when the words—

“Yes, she pretended not to see him, least of all, know him; but I notice she came home with him at not an early hour the other evening; very queer.”

“Well, you see, she never was nor has been quite our sort,” returned another voice Roma had long loved as her own.

Feeling that just to get back to her room was all she desired, she was about to return, when another beloved voice fell on her listening ear.

"To think of you girls speaking of Roma like this! The girl we have all been so proud of, and so glad to have with us always. I do not know whether he is her cousin or not, but one thing I do know. Roma Anderson is a good, sweet girl, and I refuse to hear another word. Good night."

With fleetest feet Roma sped down the long passageway and sought her room, while the keenest pain she had ever known came like a great heavy weight to her. Closing her door, she went to the open window and kneeling there tried to quiet her beating heart and throbbing temples.

What could they mean, those girls, whom she had always loved and trusted? Could it be possible they did not believe he — Ben — was her cousin, because she had refused to notice him and speak to him, when, as they said, she had gone out with him? Ah, the worse; if they only knew him as she felt now that she did, what would they say?

How long she knelt there she did not know. The cool air seemed like a sympathizing friend as it gently caressed her.

Once she had been conscious of a soft rap at her door, while the voice which had so lately befriended her called softly, "Roma, Roma," but to Roma it seemed like a far-away summons, one to which she could not reply. Finally chilled and heartsick, Roma undressed and crept into her bed, where after a long wakefulness she fell into a troubled

sleep, in which the leering face of her Cousin Ben held prominent place.

The next morning the girl was really ill, too ill to leave her bed. An unusual event in her healthful life; a slight fever and a deep depression were upon her. Toward evening feeling a little more like the real Roma, she determined to take her place at tea with the girls. With much care she dressed, even adding her beloved scarlet touch at throat and waist. With heart beating fast and faster she was about to leave her room, when a violent and unrestrainable burst of weeping mastered her, and again she crept back to bed, where her kind teacher found her some little time later. With pleasant words and assurances that she would surely be all right the following day, she left her, sending in a daintily arrayed tray of tea viands.

A friendly call before their bedtime, from several of the girls, did much for the lonely girl. But bright as she appeared to be, a sadness she had never felt, even when in her mountain home, seemed to envelop her, and even when they had bidden her a gay good night, somehow the gloom did not lift from over her.

The next day she joined her classes, noting still a goodly amount of estrangement. Toward the latter part of the afternoon she felt she must have companionship; such companionship as she felt was true, which, when tested, she still knew would be loyal. After a brisk walk, not wholly enjoyed,

as she almost feared a recurrence of the greeting of the other day, she reached her dear old friend's home and was ushered into his studio. Rising with almost deference, he greeted his girl friend, immediately commenting upon her looking a bit wan, continuing, "But never mind, Roma, the weeks will soon speed by and you will be back to your beloved mountains and pines; then the tints will visit those cheeks again."

"Yes, my dear kind friend, it will be like a pilgrim's return to his shrine. How I wish you could see our gem-like lakes and breathe our pine-scented air! I shall miss our dear talks, but I shall take something back with me that no money could ever buy; the love for my art, made doubly so by the kind interest and instruction I have gleaned from you. It was wise for me to come, I feel that now; I can, if needs be, earn a livelihood, and you see, while I have my dear Broth, still it will be pleasant to know I can some time help him, as he has done so much for me. But, dear friend, I am not so sure but it is wise for me to go back to my stanch mountains, now—"

"Roma, child, what are you saying? What is the trouble with my little artist, to-day? Never have you seemed like this before. Tell me, your old friend, my child; for it grieves me keenly to see you so dispirited," and here the grand old gentleman's face grew questioning, the mood was so unlike Roma.

"Yes, I will be frank with you. I came here,

for I felt that there would always be a welcome here for me and — I — I need it sorely.”

No tears came to the girlish eyes, but a sadness, keenly apparent, settled over the young face as she continued, “But I will not speak of the cause of my grief to-night; it may be brighter for me by the morrow. But I did feel that I must see you and feel your kindly interest in me. It has done me a world of good. Ah, my friend, stanchness is indeed a great balm, when it encircles and enfolds those dear to one. When I hear the breeze singing through my beloved pines, I shall liken the brave stanch things to you, my dear kind friend.”

“Roma, dear child that you are, if I have been any comfort, any help to you, I thank my heavenly Father for it. Thank Him also that I have been permitted the companionship of one like yourself — good, true and unselfish. You have brought much happiness into an old man’s life — more than you can ever know. But it grieves me more than I can say to see you in this disturbed condition. Perhaps, as you say, with to-morrow’s light and cheer you may find your sorrow has vanished like an unpleasant dream. At least I trust so, and now I am going to walk a way with you, if you will kindly permit me.” Here a smile, the first that had appeared on her white features, beamed forth; a gladsome sight to her aged friend.

The conversation grew brighter as their walk progressed, until when more than half-way to her

dormitory she stopped, assuring him he had given her a new lease of life, also forbidding him to walk any farther as he had already taken quite a tramp.

Reluctantly he left her, but not until he had won her promise to confide in him if the sorrow and the cause was not removed, for he declared it his right, as her old friend, to share it. Roma promised that it should be as he wished, did it continue; a sad, troubled expression again stealing for a moment into her face.

The kind old eyes of her companion noted the wounded look, and as he would have caressed his own child, had he had one, he stooped and pressed his lips to the brow of the troubled girl, saying, "God care for you, my dear child, and send you peace." Long after her retreating steps had passed beyond his hearing he stood, gazing, thinking thoughtfully about her — his little artist friend.

CHAPTER XXXI

As for Roma, as she sped through the freshness of the early spring gloaming, a sense of rest and quietness possessed her, to which she had been a stranger since the meeting with the obnoxious Ben. A spirit almost of forgiveness even toward her kin stole over her, while ever and anon the kindly eyes of her aged friend came before her.

It was indeed a beautiful world, for it was God's world. As to communion with such natures as her kind friend, who radiated his love so clearly that it brought all who came within its radiance into harmony with the created; how she thanked her heavenly Father for such a friend, she alone knew.

As she approached the large house, which she had called home now for so many months, even the lights twinkling forth from many a window seemed silently to bid her a kindly welcome back to its safe shelter. She entered with a renewed spirit to bear and forbear, even though she felt a most unjust criticism had been passed upon her.

The next few days seemed to bring a partial reconciliation from the girls. It was evident some stanch ones were doing their utmost to obliterate the new comments regarding her, as beneath their notice and as untrue. As for Roma, it was

still very trying, but she had determined not to return to her first keen agony of mind at any cost, while the love and sympathy from a pair of faded eyes helped much in her dire need.

Eagerly she watched each mail, wishing so deeply for some word from the Broth, her dear one. The third morning after her visit to the aged artist a letter was passed to her at the same time many of her classmates received theirs. With a pleased flush of happiness she received hers, thinking of none but the Broth, and feeling his nearness. To her amazement and disappointment the writing was unknown to her, and still as she examined it more closely, it seemed a bit familiar. It was written in a large scrawly hand and was simply addressed to Roma Anderson, evidently the prefix being not known or admitted.

For a few moments Roma seemed confused, then curiosity getting the best of her, she started to open the soiled missive, but stopped, for like a warning something seemed to hold her, while a vision of Ben, her oily cousin, sprang before her. Could it be from him? If so, what could he possibly have to say to her? Wishing, still almost dreading, to learn its contents, she decided to wait until she should go to her room; for under the eyes of the many girls surrounding her, even though they were for the most part busily engaged in their correspondence, she did not think it the place for her to learn of her new and strange one.

With a feeling almost like a culprit, she hid the

untidy looking letter in the bodice of her dress. Not for some time did she have the leisure scarcely to think of it, as a lesson period was in session. Her task completed, she determined to learn its contents.

Alone in her little room, she hastily tore open the message. Yes, her intuition was correct. It began, "Dear Cousin Roma." It was from Ben, for to none other was she cousin. With a feeling of greatest repugnance, the girl for an instant declared she would not even read his odious letter; then the memory of what she had suffered during the past week from her girl mates came as a dark cloud lowering about her, and she thought that she must be prepared to cope with him for her own peace of mind. It was only a short missive, containing a few little lines, but to Roma they held the keenest agony she had ever known.

One absorbing thought passed through her mentality, "and I believed the other, the slurs from the girls, trouble; while here the Broth was —" merciful heaven! could it be possible that she had even so much as allowed the meaning of the word to enter her consciousness. If so, God forgive her! For no breath of it was true; nor was her Broth the vile thing Ben's letter said, for even the accusation was untrue and it was only one of Ben's trickeries to gain an added interview with her, but he never should, of that she was determined.

Examining the written words more minutely, she ended in a half-mirthless laugh, "Why, to think of

even crediting those words. It was most likely he, himself, did not even know the import of the message." For by the chirography, Roma felt assured, he had been under the influence of strong drink, as his words were run together, making several almost unintelligible ones.

"He had written," he said, "to inform his high and mighty cousin, that her brother was a thief; that she could learn all particulars by writing Miss Nina Wentworth, Los Angeles, California, she being the lady whose jewels he had stolen."

Oh, why had he ever come to them in their mountain home? She had never liked him, nor had Joe; as for her Broth, he had been the only one who had made him welcome, and now, for some unheard of reason, he had dealt him this blow, or tried to; for that was all his bravado and untruth would succeed in doing. If the girls should ever hear of this new disgrace — but they never, never should. Still what could she do? If he had started such a terrible story from his own cruel, wicked heart, was he not capable of any act?

A rap on her door came like a far-distant message, to be followed by the voice of one of her mates, saying her artist friend was in the reception room and wished to see her. Thrusting the venomously worded letter back into its hiding-place, she sought her aged friend. Eagerly he scanned her features, as she placed her hand in his, while for an instant she thought then and there to consult him regarding her obnoxious correspondent,

but a feeling of disloyalty to that brother in even repeating such an accusation seemed to pass so strongly over her that she could not and did not as much as mention it; but instead, sunned herself in the dear companionship offered so unsparingly to her, almost forgetting for the time anything but the happiness she always enjoyed while in his presence.

After a little he declared he must not tarry longer; that he would like some sketches he had loaned her. The scrutinizing looks he had managed to give Roma seemed not to satisfy him, for he felt that the glow of perfect harmony did not fully envelop her with its warmth, and as he watched her slight, girlish figure as she hastened to bring him the articles, he found himself saying, half aloud, "Poor little lamb, she is being tested; of that I feel assured. Whatever it may be, would I might be able to bear it instead!"

Little did he dream that another portion had been added to try the womanly girl he loved so tenderly. On reaching his home, he immediately went to the studio to lay down his package, which had been but an excuse to learn of his protégé's state of being. The remainder of the evening he busied himself with his reading, though ever and anon a troubled face would appear before him.

Meanwhile, the subject of his troubled thoughts left more or less by herself began to ponder, then dwell upon the contents of her cruel letter, while the name Nina Wentworth seemed ever present be-

fore her half-dazed senses. By the time she had sought her own room she had even had such a partially disloyal thought to her Brother enter her mentality, as to the possibility of there being any truth in such a person existing as Miss Wentworth in Los Angeles.

"Why, that is where my precious bauble came from," and here Roma tendered a caress to the gift she wore so constantly, still mentally commenting upon the fact that it should have come from the same locality as this Nina, if such a person resided there.

With thoughts running riot in her poor dazed brain, the girl felt an irresistible impulse again to read the unscrupulous and untrue letter and prepared to draw it from its hiding-place. It was not there, no, nor in any fold of her apparel could it be found. "What could have become of it?" She was positive she had placed it in the bodice of her dress; but that did not matter, the thing to do was to find it — find it before some one of the girls should learn more, for which she must innocently suffer.

Without a thought of her excited appearance, she hastened from one room to another of the girls' sanctums, eagerly inquiring relative to the finding of her letter, but no clew to it did she obtain, an added dart only being added to her troubled sense as one of the girls sneeringly remarked, "Sorry, Roma; hope it was not from your charming relative."

Thankful beyond words that no one had as yet found it, yet dreading what the morrow would bring, the troubled girl sought in sleep balm for a time from the trials she had of late been overwhelmed with.

The next morning the sense of weight, at first hardly explainable but which of late had greeted her as she opened her eyes on a new-born day, was again on her, almost instantly to be followed by an instinct for her own preservation from malicious tongues. Hurriedly she dressed, her one thought being to find her lost letter at any cost. A loud rap on her door sent the color like a flame into her ivory-tinted cheeks, to recede as quickly as she opened to find a maid at her door with a letter.

"For me," was all she could command herself to say, as she almost snatched the silent thing, to the wonderment of the servant, to whom she had heretofore been most courteous.

Once again within the privacy of her room she hastily locked her door, thinking again to hide the vicious, newly returned letter, when she saw that not only was it an entirely different looking affair, as to its neatness, but that it held the clear bold chirography of her artist teacher. A twinge of pain mingled with pleasure for the moment struggled for mastery, as she opened her letter, a look almost radiant overspreading her features as she read.

"It must be fate," she soliloquized, "that it

should have gone to him, but how? It must be that it slipped from my bodice and in some way fell in with the sketches I returned. Now with deep gratitude, I feel it is right for me to confide in my dear trusted friend, else why should it have come under his notice in such an unusual manner. He will reassure me; that is worth all. And as he knows Broth so well, he will see the absurdity of the wicked letter as I do. At least, I know where it is, and that none of the girls have seen it."

Again at the close of the day Roma sought her friend; this time confiding to him all of Ben's insolence to her, of their meeting, when she had simply ignored him, and lastly of the letter which she placed in his hands, adding, "Only think of daring to accuse my dear Broth of such a terrible thing!"

With a tender look into the earnest face of the stanch girl, the sympathetic man read of the implied guilt of one so dear to her. Then putting the letter back in its soiled envelope, he crossed to where Roma stood and, lifting her face to his, assured her that he knew of one thing, that whether the accusation were true or false, they knew that as to the truth of the act, there was none; continuing:

"But, Roma, you have just said, that you have not heard from your brother for a long time and that he has been in California, even in Los Angeles. Now, dear child, I do not want to wound you, and

if your Cousin Ben has proved himself such a knave as he has in your presence been, it is no doubt a trumped-up story of his ; but on the other hand if by any unforeseen event, your brother should be in trouble, would you not, and even I, wish to know of it, so that we could render him all aid within our power? You see it in the light that I do, do you not, Roma child? ”

For a few moments as her companion began to speak seemingly in a half-questioning manner, Roma felt the first sensation of aught but deepest love for her kind helper and friend she had ever experienced, but as she looked into his almost saint-like face she realized that all he was uttering was fraught with deep thought and was only for her brother's and her own good, he was thus so expressing himself :

“ Now, dear, I think the best plan would be for me to write this Miss Wentworth, simply stating that a rumor had reached me that a lad whom I knew had been accused of stealing jewels of hers ; that I did not believe the accusation, to say nothing of mentioning the crime ; but would she kindly answer, should she ever receive the letter, not being sure as to the authenticity even of her name. Do you not think it the wisest plan? ”

To Roma the mere thought of the possibility of her Brother needing help had subdued the feeling of the momentary pain she had felt when her companion had suggested their acquainting themselves of the truth, in order to be helpful to him. Now

with his welfare vividly conscious before her, she felt she could not learn soon enough of the actual untruth of it all, bidding her companion hasten so their minds should be at rest.

That night, as she turned her steps again toward the home she was beginning to feel a sort of aversion to entering, the bright shining stars seemed to vie with each other in bringing the face of her beloved Broth before her, while the name of Nina, the woman who Cousin Ben said had accused that Broth of a felonous crime, seemed ever before her; but to which accusation there was, she knew, no, not even a tithe of truth.

CHAPTER XXXII

Many devices the fair Nina had employed to call the Hon. Allyn Prentice to her side during the days which followed the one which had installed Windy Anderson as a temporary inmate in his new home. A feeling of unrest, together with one of almost hatred toward the lad, possessed her, for she felt by many a remark from the Honorable that unconsciously the young accused boy was finding a permanent and welcomed niche in the heart, an access to which she could not seem to gain. Then, again, the eyes of young Andrews were so like the ones of the girl whose picture occupied so prominent a place in Allyn Prentice's library that it seemed almost an incident that the lawyer did not himself observe it; perhaps he had. How could she be sure? In fact, it might be the main reason of his friendship toward the lad. Still she did not think so, for he had laughingly remarked to her one day when she was speaking of her jewels, in connection with the lad:

"Do you know, young Andrews gave me quite a start the night he first became an inmate of my home. He actually dared to believe that the picture of my lassie, my mascot, was a make believe; that she really did not exist, only in a picture."

"Oh, indeed," sounded from the lips of the beautiful woman; "and did you inform him otherwise?"

"To be sure I did, the while thinking how sorry I should be were it as he had believed it."

A half sneer sprang to the lovely mouth of his companion, to be converted into an amused laugh, while mentally she vowed he should never learn from her of the nearness of the two. Also declaring to herself that one who could so cleverly conduct himself on such an occasion was sly enough for almost anything, even to the stealing of her rubies.

Meanwhile her counsel was doing all in his power to gain the good graces of his client, hoping and believing that when the day of the trial came he could wring from the lad the whereabouts of the precious gems that she seemed to deplore so deeply. That she had drawn him to her by the subtleness of her loveliness, he knew full well, and if it were in his power he would see that the much-beloved gems were again placed upon her soft, white flesh.

The trial, which had been postponed once, was now soon to be held. Meantime, he had found many an excuse for calling at the Wentworth residence, there to bask in the presence of its fascinating mistress.

"Well, Andrews, I think I shall have to keep you here in California after I clear you of your not prettily named guilt," remarked Allyn Pren-

tice, as he entered his library early one morning to find his temporary protégé poring over a law book, so completely engrossed that he did not even hear the Prince until he stood beside him.

"I believe I could even make a lawyer out of you; suppose you begin now and fight your own case,"—and here a hand was laid most kindly on the shoulder of the now standing Windy.

"Would that I could help make it a winner for you, as well as myself," returned the lad, a flash of intense gratitude springing to his eyes.

"If it were not,"—he had almost added, "for Sis," then quickly locking his heart, he had continued—"for the accusation, I should never have known you, never have known what one would do for another, that which you have done for me. As for remaining in California, I should like nothing better; the lawyer part—well, that seems pretty far away."

The knowledge the lad was trying to glean from the book which he had hastily closed at the entrance of his host, was none other than of forgery. Ever since the keenness of the sting to his wounded pride had lightened a bit, the thought of his father had come again and again to haunt and trouble him, until a ray of much brightness had passed into his soul as he realized that, like himself, he too might have been wrongly accused, and he determined that at his first opportunity he would himself ferret out the truth or otherwise as to his dead father's honesty. From that day a

lightness had sprung into his heart, which even his own disgrace could not entirely obliterate. A letter from Ned had been given him a few days after his leaving the hotel, telling him that it was a wicked shame that such an untruth should have been told of him, adding that he should keep an eye open, and who knew but what he would find a clew; also that he wished he had never coaxed him, and but for that damn cousin of his he never should.

To Windy, sympathy was comforting, giving him a temporary uplifting; nevertheless, he passed many an hour of keenest pain during the lenient imprisonment, for the thought that any one should think he would stoop to appropriate aught that did not belong to him, was humiliation enough. He had not even acquainted Joe, big-hearted, loyal Joe, of his plight. First, because he felt such a sense of wounded pride in letting his friend know of his disgrace, and secondly, because he well knew the pain it would inflict on the mentality of the mountain lad.

But, somehow, as the days passed away, he thought more often of Joe, until it seemed to him that it might be for their mutual good that he should confide in him, even though it caused added suffering to them both, though full well he knew that Joe's loyalty to him would but become stronger, for he was indeed a friend. So it was that from a land of fragrance and warmth, a letter filled with distress was sent to the pine-guarded

Snuggly to fill a lonely boy with righteous anger that any one should have dared so to stigmatize his dearest friend.

As the intuition came to Roma that Ben was not a true Ben, so to Joe came a premonition that somehow, some way the oily suave Cousin Ben was at the bottom of the whole affair. Just how it could have been consummated, Joe could not even imagine, much less know, but the feeling of the truth of his presentiment he fully believed; his one great comfort being that the little Sis did not dream of the plight of her unhappy brother.

Could he have known of the crafty letters that descended the trail with the departure of the last member of the Snuggly, the trip would not have been made in the calm, assured manner that it was. It would have been a fight to the finish. From the moment of his receiving Windy's letter it had seemed to Joe that he must go at once to his aid. The only thing that restrained him had been Windy's own wish that he should remain the guardian of the beloved Snuggly, for the lad had written:

"The ponies need your care, especially Gypsy. She must be kept at her best; for, you know, this is the spring that Sis will go home. Then it will soon be time to guide our tourists to our beloved lakes; so, Joe, you must represent the family; not but that I expect to guide, as well," he had added, "but first my honor must be upheld."

For Windy to wish was for Joe to obey, and

while he remained in the flesh he would care for the needs of the ponies, giving almost as much attention to Glossy as to Roma's loved Gypsy. His spirit seemed ever to be with the boy, whom he so longed to comfort and aid. His great love for Roma seemed to grow bigger and brighter as the days brought the faintest trace of the gladsome spring. He did not ask himself what this love would bring to him; it seemed so gloriously to fill his heart that he did not even question the end. He only knew that, when the assured spring days had come to remain, then to deepen into wondrous summer, she, his mountain queen, would be with them, perhaps never to leave her loved hills again. More than that he felt he had no right as yet to know.

To Windy, his answer was as a prop, bidding him keep up his grit, as was his wont. That when he returned to the land of the pines, he would soon forget all except its freedom. Could he have known that a letter postmarked Los Angeles and carrying the dire news to Roma had passed his own to Windy, he would have been filled with unspeakable sorrow, but thus it was. Nina Wentworth had received the inquiry relative to the theft of her jewels and had sent as requested her answer, sending anguish into a trusting heart as poignant as ever was sent by poisoned arrow.

CHAPTER XXXIII

Roma had at last consented to a silent call, a call to her mountains, her Snuggy. For days she had battled with herself, trying to know what was best and right for her to do. For days she had half avoided meeting the eyes of her schoolmates, fearing she might find in them a new aversion to her. At times it seemed almost as if she must cry out to all that it was a wicked, cruel lie that this woman, this Nina Wentworth, had spoken of her Broth. Not that any, save her aged friend, knew of the disgrace that hung over and about her dear one; he, it had been, who had told her, oh, so gently, that the accusation Ben had made was indeed true as far as the charge was concerned, adding, "But we know, Roma child, that no matter how many such may be spoken against him, he is innocent of all wrongdoing."

To the sorely tried and perplexed girl it seemed almost as if God had forsaken her; that she were standing alone in the great universe, there to battle it out with no earthly or divine will. Again and again she seemed to hear the wind sighing throughout the pines which nestled about her home, telling of the peace and quiet that awaited her, until she became possessed with such a longing to be there,

free from all questioning eyes, free from all efforts to keep from bursting into a paroxysm of tears, that little by little she yielded to the soothing voice. Having once surrendered, she seemed to feel less keenly the suffering she had endured the past few weeks; still her brother's presence seemed ever before her.

She, unlike Joe, never even so much as thought of going in person to the one in dire need, but instead wished to go home to the spot so dear to them both, there by her prayers and added faith in her Creator, to be ready to welcome him, that dear one, when he should come. When she had first declared her intention of so doing, to her artist friend, he had appeared very sober, very silent, but as he read in her wan face of a determination he till then little realized she possessed, he knew the time had come when she would have her way. Of one thing he was determined, that was, she should not take her homeward journey alone; but of this he did not at first speak; the right moment had not arrived.

Once Roma had listened to the call, she was all haste to answer its summons. She felt that had Dr. Moulton been there she would have given her full consent; in her absence she must act alone. With a sense of sadness mingled with relief she packed her pretty frocks, that her dear, kind benefactress had taken so much interest in; a half smile stealing into the girlish face as she folded the outfit she had worn from her mountain home when

she had come to be one of Dr. Moulton's world. With a loving pat she had assured both the regalia and herself that she would not long remain out of it, when once she could with propriety adorn it.

With much pride, which she could not but feel, she gathered together her work, her art — work that had rightly merited much praise from teacher and classmates. Of the inspiration, hope and ambition she had woven in with the lights and shadows, none knew but herself. At least they were hers and none could take away the joy she had possessed when at her beloved task. Nor should she ever be the same girl as when before she had learned to put her fancies before her, to become as a living joy.

She had informed her teachers that it was imperative that she should return to her home, at least, until another fall, at which time she could better decide what she would do. Her parting from her little room at Dr. Moulton's home, and with Betsy, was filled with sadness, made doubly so by the absence of the one who had indeed ever made it a home for her. Real tears stood in Betsy's round eyes, as she grasped Roma's soft hands, while the words:

"I hope I am doing as the Misses would do in letting you go — but if her old friend, the professor, thinks it is all for the best, I spects it must be. At any rate I shall bake you up a basket of eatables, so to keep your body and soul together. Ah, honey, you is certain you is doing wise to go

before the doctor returns? She will miss you, for sure."

Roma reassured her by telling her that it was not for herself alone she was returning but to be of help and to do her duty for another, and that if she knew all she would bid her do the same, she was sure.

"Well, Miss Roma, likewise you are right; and if you must go, I have a favor to ask of you."

"Yes, Betsy, I will grant it, if it is in my power," returned the girl, wondering what wish she desired.

"It is just your flame; for to me it seems like a flash sent from you."

Here the hard, wrinkled hand reached and touched with a half caress the scarlet tie which fell from beneath the firm white throat. With a laugh where mirth and pathos mingled, Roma untied the silky ornament and hung it about the amazed creature's neck, bidding her think of her often, then adding:

"And, Betsy, when you pray, think of me then, for I shall need all good thoughts to help me."

"Yes, Miss, that I will; and, believe me, this flame will seem as if it talked to me and always of you."

True to her word Betsy brought to the dormitory the evening before Roma's day for departure a goodly size basket, filled with her best culinary successes. Several small broilers done to a turn, with a tumbler of apple and grape jelly, rolls like

little birds, so dainty they seemed, her renowned hermits tucked in here and there, while even several sugared crullers were given a resting place in the attractively arranged basket. Such was her offering of love; while to Roma it helped to soften the gnawing at her heart, for love does gladden all, even if it is from what the world terms the illiterate.

The morning for her departure dawned indeed, a spring morning. The air was filled with subtle fragrance, while the bright blue sky smiled and frowned between the April showers like a girlish coquette. It had been arranged that her artist friend should call for her with a carriage, thence to accompany her to the station, there to bid her Godspeed. And now he had arrived, her good-bys had all been said — a little diffidently upon her part to a number of the girls whom she had weeks heretofore believed her stanch friends for aye. A few she left with kisses warm upon her lips, mutual sorrow at the parting.

Seated beside her aged friend, a great wave of loneliness welled up within her, giving utterance to the words he had so longed to have her speak. Words which showed her need of a true heart to lean upon and which his was yearning to be.

“How differently, oh, my kind friend, am I to return to my pine clad hills! Think. No Broth, no Dr. Moulton, no one. Oh, how I wish you were to go with me! It would seem then as if one real friend was with me, and with such everything

seems better, brighter, even if there are dark clouds passing near."

"Roma, my child, what would you say if you knew that at the station is a grip packed with my simple belongings, ready to go with you to your mountain home, should you wish it, to remain as long as I can in any way be a comfort to you?"

A deep happy sob was her sole answer, but the hand that she lifted and carried to her lips returned to its owner wet with the large tears which fell from her eyes.

Meantime, with a deep faith her aged friend was committing her to a love above all earthly friends. With almost interest Roma accompanied the porter, as he showed her companion his home-to-be for the next two days, she laughingly claiming Betsy's basket as it was placed with his belongings. Her own berth being near, she had it placed with her luggage, promising her aged friend that he should share equally with her all of Betsy's best efforts.

After the first excitement of adjusting themselves and their effects was over, Roma experienced mingled sensations — sorrow, anticipation, gratitude, all entered her mentality, each to sway her for the time. Could it be true that she was really headed for her home among the pines — true that the Broth she so longed to meet was held prisoner in the flower-scented land of California? What would Joe think of her coming? He would learn it by telegram before they reached the chalet.

She would be glad to see Joe, for it had been a long time; she supposed they had both grown older. Would he know her — the girl with her lady-like dresses and her hair fastened at her neck? But she would soon change all that. Then Gypsy. Oh, how she longed to feel herself flying through the spicy air upon the back of her knowing beast!

At times, as she glanced at her companion and noted his calm grand face, gratitude so deep would spring into her heart that a moisture would start to her eyes, often to end in a half caressing smile as she caught his eye bent upon her. Together they enjoyed the various scenes as they rapidly sped through the changing landscape. The tender green of the new spring carpet, the dainty blush upon the peach trees, the almost Italian blue of the sky, all appealed most keenly to their artistic souls. Then, as all these were left behind and the barren waste appeared, Betsy's basket of good things was duly appreciated.

Roma had never forgotten the kind conductor who had taken her under his wing when she, a half frightened creature, had been put into his charge, and had hoped she might return home with the same genial one, but she learned that he had been transferred to another route, one which took him into a milder clime.

"Yes, you must keep one eye open, Professor, for Galgary station at night is well worth seeing. You would think you were going to a bazaar;

then it is a sort of forerunner of my mountains. Oh, my dear kind friend, I am sure you will not think I have praised their beauty too much when you see them, for you will love them simply because you cannot help it."

Roma's enthusiasm transmitted itself to her companion, who began to feel a positive anticipation to behold the foothills, then the trails and lastly the sublime snow-clad peaks of her native mountains. In the early morning light, after the brightly illumined Calgary had been passed, he began to realize more than he had deemed it possible of the beauty, grandeur and majesty of the Rockies. As for the girl, her face was enrapt. It was as one re-meeting a life-long friend, one cherished and dearly beloved.

The spring days were still partially slumbering in this land of snow and ice, but here and there the verdure was making a brave fight for life and freedom from its icy bed. The legion of pines, firs and hemlock seemed to straighten in recognition of the gladsome spring days, for they had freed themselves of their mantle of snow and in so doing felt that they were helping to hasten the time of the appearing of the welcomed bud and blossom.

Not until Roma stood on the platform with the stately glaciers visible, all about her, did she give entire vent to her ecstasy; then with her arm tucked into her aged friend's, she turned him about, first to view this peak, then that. The air was keen and frosty, but the sun poured down

its great glowing warmth on them and before they were hardly aware the closed wagon had drawn them away, and was carrying them up — up to the region of the great chalet, and its priceless gem, the iridescent lake.

With great joy Roma espied the beautiful Scotch collie which she had petted many a time as with her brother she had descended the trail to pay a brief visit to the attractive chalet. She had written Joe that she should be at the keeper's home (a portion of the chalet) at a certain day, and should expect him to meet her; of her friend's companionship, at the time she knew nothing, and now as she silently watched the admiration that had leaped, then to remain in those thoughtful eyes, she felt that he was being rewarded by his appreciation of nature's wondrous beauty for his great kindness to her.

Again under the porte-cochère, she viewed the Victoria glacier, towering, like the celestial guardian it was, over and above its now cameo-like lake. Once more she beheld the shrine, one that seemed to her the purest, holiest, she could ever know, and for moments her soul seemed to meet its Maker. When she once more felt the earthly, it was to hear the voice of Joe, speaking, oh, so quietly,

“Roma, is this really you?”

Lifting her eyes, she gazed into those of the loyal-hearted Joe, her almost brother, then with a quick impulse she reached up for a kiss in greeting, which she received; but one so quiet, so hum-

ble, as it was pressed upon her fair brow, as to almost chill the startled girl. Only for the moment, however, did Roma regard it. The next, Joe was being presented to her companion.

Meanwhile, the collie was most ferociously greeting the girl, barking and capering wildly about her, as if to make up for Joe's almost cold greeting. As for him, it seemed as if he could never again move from the place on which he was standing, such a feeling of muteness seemed to overpower him, such coldness did he manifest. Could one have felt his great pulsing heart as it sent its throbs on, then on, they would have deemed it almost a miracle that he did not cry aloud in his eagerness, instead of emerging into the silent being he seemed.

After a little the spell seemed broken, but not until the professor, who like Dr. Moulton had learned the young man's secret, had sought to put him at his ease did he seem like the Joe of former days. No word was spoken either of Windy or Ben, Roma thinking it best to wait until they were safely up the trail and home in their own Snuggy.

At last Joe's tongue was loosed, and he was indeed Joe. Gypsy and Scotty, he informed her, were at the rear of the chalet, adding that they were full of life, and he thought it best to leave them there.

It did not take Roma long to speed to her own Gypsy, and who shall say dumb creatures have no minds, for, as the collie, so the pony knew it was

indeed she, the girl Roma. Caress after caress she vouchsafed the knowing creature, then untying her, she leaped on her back, sitting side-saddle until she should have donned her togs, then giving her the rein, she appeared down the drive before the eyes of the waiting ones.

Meantime, Joe had proposed a plan of ascending the trail, one which would make the ascent most easy for the new-comer, and one which he had employed before. The sparkle in Roma's eyes and the color in her heretofore pale cheeks seemed even to cause the professor to appear years younger than upon the day of their starting for their lengthy trip; while Joe's eyes seemed riveted to her flashing face.

Some little time later a curious procession began the ascent; Roma having gotten into her buckskins, though still wearing her jaunty little Eastern turban, for want of a place to seclude it; the professor, seated in a sort of box affair fastened upon a low dray; Joe leading Scotty, to whose harness the crude sedan chair had been fastened. Again up the trail the mountain girl passed, the cool air filling her veins like new wine, her heart longing yet dreading to reach the Snuggy, for her Broth would not be there. Then, as if to repay her kind companion for his great sacrifice in coming with her, as well as to bring a happy smile to Joe's frank face, Roma would hallo, her voice sounding like a clarion call. Joe's attention was thus divided between his solicitation for the comfort of

Roma's guest and his desire not to miss a gesture of the girl he so deeply loved.

Few real traces of spring they saw as they climbed the shaded trail, still the marks of winter had nearly passed and they knew it would not be long now before it would also be spring with them in this mountainous land. Gypsy many times sent forth a glad whinny, to be answered by her rider as well as the other pony, each time sending a pang to the heart of the brave girl, as it brought before her the absent, beloved face of him she so yearned to meet.

And so they reached the summit of the trail, reached the Snuggly Roma had seen in her waking and sleeping dreams many times since she had left it to become an inmate of Dr. Moulton's world. And now, quicker than Joe, she had slipped from her saddle and was standing with outstretched hands to welcome her tried friend to the home of her girlhood.

CHAPTER XXXIV

A week had already sped by since Roma together with her artist friend had become inmates of the Snuggy amid the mountains. To the girl the freedom she was beginning to enjoy was very blest, for she had been under such trying surveillance for some time previous that now to have escaped from critical glances was a great relief.

That her heart was very sad and cast down, both her companions could plainly see, and each in his different way strove to cheer and uplift her. With Joe she had taken several rides, had again visited some of her beloved haunts, although many were still hardly accessible, as the winter longed to tarry still a bit.

The first evening of their arrival and after the tea things had been cleared away, Roma with true womanly thoughtfulness strove to create an atmosphere of gladsome home cheer. Many a little pat here and there converted the immaculate room into a most habitable abode. The couch was drawn a trifle nearer the blazing log fire which had greeted them at their first arriving, having been laid ready to do its share to welcome, and which Joe soon had sputtering and sparkling for their comfort and appreciation.

Again now she sent the light to Joe's eyes with comments always of praise for the care and thoughtfulness with which he had kept the Snuggly, admiring the many new skins which had been added during her absence and which Joe had gloried in providing, as he knew they would dress up the Snuggly for Roma's returning.

As the evening had advanced all thought of the one who was separated from them by so many miles, still no mention had as yet been made of him. Suddenly Roma, who had been keeping very quiet for some time, exclaimed:

"Joe, my true friend, I am sure you must think it very unlike me not to mention the absence of my beloved Broth. The fact is, I did not feel on entering my long-abandoned home as if I could at once lay bare to you the real reason of my sudden return; but, Joe, while I know the untruth of all I have been forced to learn relative to that dear one, I felt it impossible longer to remain away from the home so dear to me, also feeling that I should be here at my post when that brother returned to me."

Before she had half finished her confession as to the truth of her home-coming, Joe was on his feet and had advanced so that he stood beside her, while with great tenderness he laid his large firm hand on her shoulder and a look stole into his eyes telling of a love which would willingly spare her all suffering were it in his power. He then bade her not to pain herself further, as he knew from

Windy's own letter that very week of the trouble to him to which she referred and that he had half surmised when receiving her letter that she also was acquainted with the vile slander.

On learning of her Broth's letter and how he had confided all to Joe, Roma felt more than before that this loyal-hearted lad was indeed an almost brother to her, and with great eagerness she sought him to allow her to read the letter he had received from the absent one.

With much pity in his heart for the great honest fellow, the professor turned his eyes away, but not until he had noted the perceptible start he had made as the words, "Joe, my almost brother," had fallen from Roma's troubled lips.

Windy's letter, Roma read aloud; to be followed by renewed assuring from her companions, by their words of courage and cheer bidding her feel that all must soon be well with that far distant one.

From that evening Roma determined to fill her position as hostess, covering her sad heart by trying to give joy to the members of her household. While much as they appreciated her efforts and sunned themselves in her smiles, they were neither blind nor unconscious of her efforts, which at times seemed beyond her strength, so sad she appeared.

The little trunk which Joe had so proudly loaned her had returned again up the trail, together with another, this one Roma's own, in which many of her sketches were carefully packed. With warm welcome she received them, keen pleasure resting on

her face as she drew this one, then that, from its wrappings.

Joe it had been who had brought them on his dray from the chalet where they had been taken by the stage, and now Joe it was who stood gazing almost speechless as one by one he viewed scenes and faces which seemed to him from another land. As for the girl, she was again living over the period of her sojourn from the mountain home as she viewed her work. At last she came to the sketch of her Broth, while with wonder and curiosity she waited to hear what Joe would say as the familiar face of the lad seemed to smile back at them, as she held it out to view.

Expecting to hear some remark from her companion, she waited ; but none came to her eager ear. With a half-puzzled look she turned, to find Joe literally staring into the pictured face of the lad Windy, his own face bearing the same look it had held when he had stooped and kissed her forehead the day of their first meeting. With solicitation Roma had exclaimed :

“ What is it, Joe? Are you faint, or ill? ”

At the sound of her voice, the great stalwart fellow had pulled himself together, though he evaded her question, still keeping his gaze on the features of his boy comrade, then turning to the girl he had almost breathed, “ It is wonderful.”

From that day Joe had seemed preoccupied, for his mind was troubled. The aged artist saw the struggle that was going on in the honest lad's con-

sciousness and grieved for him, for he knew full well that the girl he so passionately loved would never be happy as the wife of the mountain lad. He also knew that she had never for a moment regarded him save as her almost brother, as she had called him. A few days after the unpacking of her portfolio and colors, Roma had been possessed to use her paints again.

She had been unusually sad and disheartened the entire morning, for thoughts had entered her mentality which had seemed to bear her down. What if her Broth should not be proved innocent; what would become of her as well as himself? True, she knew he was innocent, but if he could not prove it so to the world, what then? More than once she had resolved to write to this Nina, whoever she might be, and implore her to free the lad from the wicked accusation.

To-day, somehow it seemed to her that her Broth needed her presence to comfort him and to cheer. Seeking her room she was soon lost in deep meditation, going over in her mind many things which had troubled her during the past few weeks, until she felt that indeed aid came from the power of One "whom eye hath not seen nor ear heard."

Shifting her thoughts she seemed to commune with the great Power, while a feeling of deep peace stole over her, comforting her by its very nearness. After a little she rose, putting a fresh canvas on the board which rested on her easel, then with her

colors began to prepare her pallet. Color for her had now become as friends, companionable in her loneliness. Now with their alluringness before her she took from one, then another, forming a soft grayish background, seeming like soft fleecy clouds.

Suddenly there seemed to come to her senses a feeling that she might perhaps aid her Broth; very little she knew of law, but she did know that money was most necessary. Why should she not strive with her talent to gain some for him who was now unable to win it for her? With thoughts passing as fleetly before her as the colors beneath her hand, came the vision of a woman, such a one as she felt the one to be who had accused her Broth of taking her gems. Women of society and fashion she had seen, women with their soft, clinging loveliness, bedecked with color and laces, their rounded necks and arms caressed by gems priceless as well as radiant. They were women of another world than Dr. Moulton's, women for the most part given only to their own gratification or to elicit envy or comment from others seemingly less fortunate.

Her dear benefactress had given her a glimpse of such life which she in her busy career had little time to partake of. At the opera, in particular, Roma had caught gleams of loveliness which had held her spellbound. Of such as these she felt this Nina Wentworth to be. Boldly her stroke passed, then repassed, on the canvas, until a woman's face and figure was dimly outlined. As moment after

moment passed Roma still stood at her easel while under her skilled hand a presence seemed to radiate. On she worked until a warmth teeming with life met her from the glance of eyes, so like the spring's first violet, eyes whose color Roma had always admired and which now unconsciously she placed before her.

How silent was the Snuggy! No sound save the twittering of the sparrows, and an occasional chatter from the squirrels who seemed glad to be liberated from their long winter's rest, broke upon the clear air. The rays of the western sun began to steal in at the window, bathing all in its glad effulgence. Still she worked on, the dim figure giving place to bold outline as the shadows began to lengthen. With a perceptible start the girl paused, to find that the sun had passed for that day down beneath the vista where she so often bade it good night, and that indeed twilight was come.

Hearing the returning steps of her friends she hastily caught up a throw with which she covered her sketches and hid the violet eyes from view.

From then on every moment she could find, every moment she could with unselfishness free herself from her companions, found her before her canvas. Ever she seemed called to her work and to it she responded. At last the day came when her painting was finished. All had been consummated, with the exception of a few trifling details. Joe and the aged artist had viewed it, both filled with wonder, a portion of awe mingling with Joe's

thoughts as he pondered over and again the fact that Roma's hands could create such a presence.

For days the sad almost entreating look in the girl's eyes had pierced his heart, while as the time passed, bringing no word from the absent one, he had practically made up his mind that he must for her sake, if not for his own, go to that brother, there to remain, to do all in his power for him.

Of his great overpowering love for Roma he realized more day after day; still by no word, nor conscious look, had he betrayed himself to the girl, for he felt that, much as he wished to befriend her in her need, he had no right to thrust himself on her; at least, until his comrade should be present to wish him a victory of his heart's desire.

Having determined upon his journey, both the professor and himself deemed it wiser not to acquaint Roma, for in her great loyalty to that Broth, when knowing in his letters he had deemed it best for Joe to remain at home in the mountains, she might be overcautious in complying with his written request. While, to both the elder and the younger man, it seemed almost inhuman that no one of his own should be near him in this the hour of his need. The elder friend had promised to care most faithfully for the ponies, adding, "And I am sure you could not attend our little lady more devotedly."

Here a pang positively smote the speaker's heart as he witnessed the radiant look which unconsciously illumined his companion's face at his men-

tion of the loved girl. At the same moment the subject of their thoughts was bestowing the skill of which she was mistress upon her painting, where it had now become a radiant presence under her trained fingers.

Enchanting would well express her effort of the graciously beautiful woman who, alluring, enticing, was before her. Soft, shimmering folds, half disclosing, half revealing her subtle curves, the creamy flesh seemingly invested with life, while lurid light seemed to gleam and flash from the jewels which, blood-red, lay so lightly over her perfect bosom. Roma stood for a long period contemplating, then with feelings half admiring, half repelling, she turned from her finished creation.

During the evening they all strove to make it one of cheer, Roma remarking several times that, were she near a metropolis, she should try to dispossess of her society woman who still possessed her gems, the proceeds to go to her Broth, were she so fortunate. To which, both the professor and the stalwart lad assured her there would be no doubt as to her securing a purchaser.

As the evening drew apace, they were startled by a loud baying. All instantly were on their feet, for the sound seemed to come in close proximity to the Snuggy.

"Hello! I believe that is one of kin to the buck I shot shortly before your return," exclaimed Joe, "and whose skin adorns the very chair, Roma, you have been sitting on."

Here Joe, all animation, was about to rush for his shotgun, thinking to add still another trophy of love for the comfort and admiration of the beloved girl.

"No, Joe,"—and before he had barely started, Roma was by his side, exclaiming, "I am sure your only wish is killing the creature that our Snuggy may be the possessor of his warm coat. But think, Joe, the spring is almost with us, the gladsome time for all; so shall we not allow him to live, to enjoy?"

Again the moaning was plainly apparent, although now at a distance, the buck seeming to realize that he had been nearer than he believed to a foe. For an instant a trace of disappointment hovered over the features of the stalwart lad, to be followed by a look of tenderness, which Roma must have wondered at, had she fully witnessed it. With a deep, smothered sigh, he reassured her:

"Yes, Roma, your petition shall be granted; your forest friend shall go free."

"Thank you, Joe; that is like you to grant me what I ask. But where are you going? Have you forgotten that early in the evening you fed and prepared the ponies?"

"No; I have not forgotten that; but somehow I feel like a turn in the moonlight. Perhaps the freedom you have given your forest neighbor has fired me for a draft of the woods. Howbeit—"

"Joe, may I go with you for a little way? I have not been out under the pines at night since

my return, and, as you say, I too would like a breath of the forest and a peep at the stars up — up through the pines.”

“Roma, child, why to-night?” — the words came from the professor, who seemed to divine the real reason for the suddenness of Joe’s proposed stroll. Of his departure on the morrow, as well as his almost overmastering love for Roma, he knew. Would he be strong enough to put his love to the test, to remain silent when that great love welled in his heart and she, whom he feign would lavish it on, was before him in the moonlight?

“Only for a breath, dear Professor; then I will return and we will finish our story, for I also am most anxious to learn the outcome of the little comedy.”

Hastily donning her buckskin jacket, then catching up a warm scarf of scarlet cloth, she followed Joe out into the cold, still moonlight. As they passed under the tall, grim pines, the stars seemed to dance in the black firmament, so gay and sprightly did they appear, while farther, still farther away, could be heard the baying of the freed moose.

Suddenly Roma paused to view, as the moon’s rays showed to advantage against the trunk of a noble pine, a device which she had noticed on several of the trees on her return and which she had intended speaking of, for she felt very sure it was through Joe’s kindness to his little furry friends that they had been placed there.

"Joe, what do you put in these little troughs?" she exclaimed, as she playfully thrust her hand into the crude receptacle. "Sugar that you give my Gypsy, or something more to be relished by your chattering friends?"

The lad, looking like a sturdy pioneer, drew nearer to where she was standing, while in a voice hardly natural even to his own hearing, he replied,

"Roma, lass, do you remember the weeks before you left your mountain home; did you know that even before you yourself knew you were lonely, that you needed companionship different than we could bestow upon you, that I read it in your every glance, heard it in every word you spoke?"

"Joe, why do you speak so sadly of that now? I am at home again, nor do I ever mean to leave it more." Here with a sudden motion half childish, half womanly, she clasped her hands around the arm of her companion, and looking up into his earnest eyes, she continued, "But, Joe, did you miss me so much, so keenly, that the very thought of it makes you sad?"

"Yes, Roma; more than you can ever know. And to help to forget, I busied myself in many ways; these little devices, as you call them, being of the many to fill in the time of your return. What I have locked away in my heart all these weary months, I must tell you of, and to-night. It is no use. I have thought to quiet my intense longing, until Windy was with us, but it cannot be kept silent any longer, for, Roma, you must

hear of the great love which is in my heart for you."

Could the moan, which sounded so low as almost to be from the night wind, have come from the now silent, slender figure, as she stood silhouetted against the shadow of the grim pines? — while the eager tones of the lad continued, "And I have felt lately, as I have seen your brave, sad face, that, if I might, how gladly would I suffer your suspense for you! Roma, speak and tell me. Could you become my wife, to live with me, where my every wish should be to fulfill yours, and where you should be free from all trouble, all care?"

"Joe, my dear good Joe," — with a cadence of sadness the name fell on the lad's waiting ear, bringing to him anguish, as if hearing his death knell, — "you speak of your love for me. I, too, have love, deep love, for you; but, Joe, it is not, nor could it ever become, a wife's love; for, my dear Joe, I have always looked on you as a brother; and, believe me, I would give worlds if I might awake and find that your ardent love for me was only a fanciful dream, for, most loyal one, I grieve to wound you."

"Roma, why, why are you so sure it could never be otherwise?" pleaded the great sturdy lad, as he bent his now pale face toward hers, his earnest, wide-opened eyes seeming fairly scanning her soul.

"Just why, I cannot tell," the girl returned, her own face looking strangely white in the moonlight, while unconsciously her fingers sought and

held the bauble she always wore, as she continued: "You see, Joe; as you say, you so deeply missed me while I was away from my home. So I often felt lonely for you, but, oh — do not think I wish to wound you, far from it — but I must be true. I did not feel such love, never for one moment, as you had for me. While, if I had really and truly loved you as I should to become a good wife, don't you see I must have realized it?"

"Yes, Roma; I suppose that is as you say and I expect it is as it was intended to be, for you are of a different world. I have seen it ever since you returned; your love and skill for your painting has changed you. Oh, would you had never left your mountain home! It would all have been so different then."

"No, Joe, do not say that; for I must have gone some time into the artist's world; the call would have sounded and I should have answered, just as I have returned to the Snuggy in answer to a silent call which gave me no peace until I obeyed. As for shielding me from all trouble — my dear faithful friend, you have always made me very happy by your great, unselfish care."

Lower and lower the silvery moon had now fallen, while a brisk wind was beginning to sigh throughout the pines. With tenderest solicitation Joe folded the bright scarf which had partially fallen from the glossy hair, while in a voice which he manfully strove to appear natural he said:

“Remember, Roma, it shall remain between us as it has always been, for it was so to be; of that I now see clearly.” Then, turning her face with gentle hand, he lifted it until their eyes met — a look of deep love but quiet resignation in his, a sad, thoughtful tenderness in hers. Then with united steps they retraced their way back to where the light beamed forth at them from the Snuggly.

CHAPTER XXXV

Long into the night Joe seemed to feel the warm fingers of the girl, who had with gentle frankness, in bidding him good night, laid her hand so quietly into his; little realizing that for her the great honest fellow was about to leave his accustomed haunts, even though his great love had not been blest. Still, for her, he was willing, even eager, to do all that lay in his power.

Little sleep came to his nerve-racked brain, for to him the proposed journey seemed a stupendous undertaking. Of one thing he felt grateful, as he thought over again and again the happenings of the past few weeks. He could, and should, carry out Roma's wish to dispose of her painting. The professor had assured him, after the girl had left them for the night and they had remained for one more talk before his departure, that of a certainty he would find a purchaser, also a goodly price would be realized, "For, my lad, you may rest assured it is a rare one."

For Joe to have taken the picture without the express wish from the artist would have been impossible, even though he fully realized his dire need for money, but at Roma's wish it should be borne from the land of the pines to find a home in a sunny clime.

With greatest care the wondrous being was prepared by the skilled hands of the aged artist for its transportation; also the price named that he felt it should realize. A look of almost reverence stole into the aged face as he bade the lad take courage, for he had read the faces of the maid and her companion on their return earlier in the evening, and with subdued homage he now regarded the lad.

Long before the gray light began to steal in at his window, Joe was making his needed preparations. As the first tinge came into the eastern sky, he had silently bade good-by to his home, to the abode that now sheltered the girl he still so dearly loved. He was to descend on foot the mountainous trail, his prized commission to accompany him. With a fervent hand-clasp the aged professor bade him Godspeed, a dimness he was not ashamed of obstructing the great stalwart figure from his vision as he turned back into the Snuggy.

In a flowered land, another lad had been tested. At times such a longing for the pine-girded hills would steal about him as to cause the sight of even the lovely flowers to become almost obnoxious. True, he was happy at times; for when with the Prince, how could he be otherwise? The delaying of his trial had been sorely trying to him, as he knew the spring was well-nigh come even in the mountains, and that he should be there.

During all the period he had been awaiting his

trial, no positive proof had been found, no alibi produced; still the certainty with which the Prince assured him he should be free had given him a faith he himself could scarce account for; while between the faces of the lovely featured woman who had accused him and who, he felt, positively abhorred him and the questioning eyes of the pictured face the Prince declared to be a mascot, Windy felt lay a punishment for having kept the secret of his identity from one who had so valiantly upheld him.

His thoughts of his dear Sis were many and deep, a feeling of ease often following one of anxiety, as he realized the strangeness of his Sis's presence and that it seemed to fill a heart besides his own with pleasure; that heart, the sternly tender one of the Prince. The lad had also learned Nina Wentworth's secret; learned that a great, overwhelming love encircled his benefactor, but that the love was selfish ambition; worldly, he also realized, as again and again he found himself thinking, at times almost voicing his thoughts aloud, "Indeed, she is not half good enough for him." Just why he felt that way he could not have told. Not because of her dislike and her accusation of him, for he believed she honestly felt him to be the —, even to himself he would not utter the word. Lovely of face and figure he admitted her to be, but to him she did not ring true, so he explained it to himself.

Windy was right in his conjecture as to the feeling Nina Wentworth entertained for him. More

than once, as she had met him in passing through the apartment of the Hon. Allyn Prentice, had she been tempted to address him by his rightful name, but a glance at the graceful form and truthful eyes of his — for her — almost hated Sis would dispel the resolve; she fearing lest the Honorable would then in some way meet his pictured guest.

That the girl was truly lovely was but an added reason for her to declare they should never meet if she could prevent it, as she was well determined to do. She had wondered many times, since replying to her correspondent in the East to the effect that most assuredly the lad called Anderson had been accused and by her of stealing gems, whether the lad had ever acquainted that Sis; she had never learned; herself adroitly keeping his assumed name from being known to the Eastern friends, as well as his place of residence, thereby doing all in her power to keep that now dreaded Sis and the Right Honorable apart. But it was not to be, for Fate, if we call it by that name, was busily arranging matters in its own way.

At last the day had arrived wherein Windy should either be declared innocent — free to go to his dear waiting one in the mountain home, where now he knew her to be — or to remain a marked, disgraced lad in the eyes of the world. No news of importance for or against the case had been received. Ned Brigham, poor lad, had been almost ill since Windy had been taken from the hotel; ever on the alert, he had failed to find any clew

by which to aid his friend. It had been over a week now since Windy had received any word from the Snuggy. Snuggy — the very name caused a faintness to creep over him as he realized what the word meant: liberty, love; aye, even a future.

What wonder, then, that on this day of all days, the word meant so much to the anxious lad? That Joe was coming to him — Joe, whom just to behold would be to inspire confidence by his stanch faith in his almost brother — Windy did not dream.

The sweetly scented air seemed almost mockery to Windy as, accompanied by the Prince, he entered the open taxi which was to convey them to the accursed scene of which he was to be the chief actor. Birds were singing, flowers blooming; while in a pair of violet eyes, rivaling in beauty all, a cruel, relentless determination lay — the return of her jewels or punishment for the lad to the extent of the law.

Scarcely had they taken their places on the platform of the court-room than the violet-eyed woman made her appearance, bearing herself as a queen of old, so potent she felt her beauty, while her attorney, smiling and urbane, hastened to greet her.

Soon the case was in full action, attorneys, accuser and accused all feeling the import of their individual testimonials. The morning grew apace; still the case remained in action, while now and again even the faint breath of perfume which was

wafted to the cruelly pent-up lad from the woman gowned all in soft brown seemed even in its daintiness to permeate censure to him, so bitter was her demeanor.

As for Allyn Prentice, the lawyer who had already made name and fame for himself; as he argued the case of his young client he experienced a new interest, an interest he could not explain nor understand, even to himself. The case seemed vital to him; vital that she should clear the lad he had grown to love, as he now realized he had; for as he had watched the color fade little by little from the boyish face during the trying ordeal through which he had passed, leaving no trace of guilt, simply anguish, a something had sprung into his own heart he realized had heretofore been foreign to it.

As for the woman with her soft loveliness, he was beginning to feel positive aversion, for he seemed to realize that a heart, bitter, relentless, tyrannical, beat under the full white bosom.

The stirring whistle and bells announced the noon hour. A short respite was given the court, after which the case was to be continued, then to go into the hands of the jury. With eyes for none but the criminal lawyer, Nina Wentworth turned with almost impatience from the man who seemed to lavish love on her from his every glance, for Lauren Stocton had indeed blessed fate for sending the case of the lost gems to him, thereby

allowing him to bask in the sunlight of her glorious eyes.

It was a certainty that he should win the case and that mattered much, for as she had once expressed to him, "If I cannot gain back the jewels now, it will be some satisfaction to put that young thief behind the walls of a safe retreat; there, sooner or later, he will admit his guilt, and by that time his disgrace will have proved a barrier,"—here with a laugh, she had added,—"even of love."

Just what she had meant when she alluded to love, her attorney did not understand. Why should he?—the words had fallen from the red lips of a cruelly clever woman.

With quiet gentlemanliness Allyn Prentice declined Nina Wentworth's suggestion that they step into an adjacent café for lunch, he declaring it most necessary that he return to his apartment, as he had to look for important papers which he needed at a meeting to be held at the close of the court.

With a touch of her old impetuosity, the woman in her simple elegance returned to her own attorney, who eagerly complied with her wishes. With alacrity Allyn Prentice then sought the lad Andrews, bidding him still hope on, the end had not come; a smile, good to see, leaping into the eyes which looked up at the Prince, as he answered, "I will; it is the least I can do for you."

Allyn Prentice then told the lad he should send

him in a bite, and that he should be back at the appointed time to finish fighting for him until the end.

CHAPTER XXXVI

From a land of almost solitude into a world of action, Joe, the sturdy pioneer, had been literally hurled. As to Roma, so to him — the advent into a new world seemed almost like the performing of some miracle, so wonderful it all appeared; the whole mode of his transportation holding a keen fascination for him and fortunately acting in part as an antidote for the heavy pain which had weighed him down so persistently since his parting with the girl Roma.

With eyes filled with wonderment and a heart beating tumultuously, the lad entered the city where he was to find his old pal Windy. Just how to reach him, he little knew. Confusion as well as desire made him an object of notice; then his attire, unmistakably Western, added to his unusual appearance, while the large, framed object, as well as a dusty portmanteau, did not detract from the crude picture.

After several attempts to gain the location of the avenue Windy had given as his address, he succeeded, and straightway bent all his pent-up energy in reaching his destination. A long jaunt he found it to be, but on he plodded, never for a moment thinking to relieve himself of his burdens

or give himself respite nor even a lift by a hired conveyance. In fact, the thought never entered his consciousness, so filled was it with the thoughts of meeting Windy. Several times he was obliged to ask his way, so strange to him the whole scene appeared.

The last of his tramp had brought him in the location of a fine residential section, where, ere he was aware, so engrossed was he by the grandeur of his surroundings, the very number he was searching for loomed up before him. With almost timidity he ascended the steps which led him to the imposing entrance. Here he was met by a colored lad, looking very spruce in his neat regalia, a half smile springing to his countenance as Joe with a loud weary sigh released himself from his burden, the same moment inquiring if he might be allowed in No. —, as he had a friend staying there.

"Guess you sure can," answered the dusky lad. "But first I'll whistle up and let Pratt know."

"Pratt," exclaimed Joe, somewhat disgusted at the wrong construction, as he supposed, of Windy's name, but giving his whole attention to the blowing that the boy was performing through a metal device. Soon a succession of little clicks followed the words which were spoken through the same opening through which the whistling had been carried on, and Joe was then shown the way to the apartment.

Again he was met by a person seeming of some importance, this time of his own color, and who

proved to be the Pratt the boy had spoken of. Rather stern and unfriendly this last personage appeared to the Westerner, as he asked to see a lad who said he lived at that address.

To his inquiry, Joe was informed that neither the lad nor the Hon. Mr. Prentice were at home. "But as I expect the latter any minute, you may step in and wait, if you like."

Thanking the man, Joe entered the — to him — palatial room, accompanied by the precious canvas, so wrapped as to appear almost grotesque, but which he insisted on guarding. As he stood within the luxuriant room a sense of latent manliness supported him, crowning him, even in his conscious bewilderment, with the stamp of the true gentleman.

With his sombrero held tightly in his large brown hand he seated himself, wondering just where Windy could be. Then, as moment after moment passed, he gained a tithe of assurance as his glance rested here and there with pleased eagerness, the atmosphere of the room seeming to soothe his anxious fears.

Such luxury, such taste; even the lad from nature's wiles felt it was superb; while the thought of Roma, that she had seen, even lived, perhaps, where surroundings were of this sort, seemed to build an added barrier between them; he finding himself again excusing the girl for her refusal of himself, as he again realized their different ideas of life.

The fragrance and beauty of the flowers he had passed since entering the charmed city had been greatly admired by the lad, who loved nature devoutly, and as the moment sped away and no one appeared, the perfume from a cluster of white oleanders seemed to coax him to a nearer draught of their sweetness, he yielded, and, crossing the room, was about to inhale its rare fragrance, when pictured eyes riveted his attention.

For an instant he could scarcely realize it was but a picture he was gazing into, for the eyes seemed so like those he had recently looked into that their genuineness seemed assured. In fact, she seemed so much in his every thought that her appearance for the moment did not seem strange to him.

“Roma! Roma! Well you grace your surroundings, as do you also the Snuggy amid the pines. Ah, little girl, you were true and frank with me; may I be of some help to you in your keen grief and despair!”

His hand still rested on the choice silver frame, where he had turned the pictured face more toward himself, when a masculine voice resounded throughout the room. That his words had been heard, and deeply wondered at, the stalwart lad gave no thought as he advanced toward the person who had so quietly yet unmistakably addressed him,

“My man has informed me that you wish to see a lad whose address was given here. Can I be of any service to you?”

Here a deep, penetrating look accompanied the inquiry. "Roma, Snuggy," the words not only rang in the ears of the Hon. Allyn Prentice but seemed written in words of fire before his eyes, as he still continued to keep his glance riveted on the face of the youth who now stood before him.

"I am here to find Albert Anderson, my friend and almost brother. I have come from our home in the mountains, where his sister waits in suspense his coming. Can you tell me where I may find him?"

"I know a youth named Andrews; of his home and sister I cannot say, for he has never spoken of either to me. He is the lad who has lived with me for the past weeks, and whose case I am naturally much interested in, as I am his lawyer."

The words had barely left Allyn Prentice's lips when,

"Oh, sir, Windy never took those accursed gems. I have known him nearly all my life and a squarer pal never breathed. Why he gave you his name as Andrews, I cannot say—"—then a thought of Roma's picture, holding such prominence in the room of the man who knew nothing of her real identity flashed over him, and he remained silent.

Crossing quickly to the picture, to which the new-comer had been so enrapt that he had failed to hear his approach, Allyn Prentice also turned the truthful eyes well toward his own, an unusual light leaping to his as he began to realize just

what his girlish mascot was to his young client.

"Andrews, Sis, the girl of the Snuggy." It did indeed mean much even to him. Turning with reluctance from the eyes that seemed to hold his, Allyn Prentice recrossed to where the lad was standing and extending his hand he expressed that he was glad to meet so stanch a friend as he felt he was, to both that brother who had been and was passing through so trying an ordeal, as was also the loyal sister waiting patiently for the outcome.

A heart-to-heart talk followed, the lawyer telling the lad of the mountains that a sister of his college chum had sent the photograph to him, also telling him of her visit at the Snuggy.

"Can you mean our kind lady Dr. Moulton?" came in eager tones from the lad, a smile of positive pleasure lighting up his strong features.

"Yes, it is to her I refer. But, come, tell me all you can of this pal of yours, for by your communication I may be able to win the freedom we all crave for him; for, young man, this is the day of his trial and Providence may have sent you to me for a purpose."

Thereupon followed many points of interest relative to the inmates of the Snuggy, a keenness making itself apparent on the lawyer's face as Ben's character was deftly unfolded under his skillful strategy. Much longer would Allyn Prentice have liked to linger, hearing of the life lived far away from the haunts of man, but he realized he was needed to fight for one who added a great

share of brightness to that little colony, and who he now felt certain had sought to shield even the photograph of the loved sister, so that no disgrace should even surround her pictured identity.

"And now, Joe, if you wish you may accompany me back to the court-room, but perhaps it will be best not to let your presence be known to your friend until his case has been settled, as it might unnerve him, and he needs all his courage this day. For fight for him as I have and shall, still things look rather dark, although I believe that from what you have told me of this Ben, this cousin, I have a new card to play and one that may prove a trump."

"Heaven grant it may be so," broke from the now eager, tremulous lips of the guide of the mountains, while ere the words had scarcely left his lips, he had turned toward the package he had guarded so carefully since it had left its first abiding place exclaiming,

"But I must show you before you return to fight for my pal, the work that loyal sister has been doing, hoping by her efforts to earn money to help all in her power to free that dear one."

With hands which trembled, so keyed up he had become over the whole affair, the stalwart youth unwrapped and placed before the astonished eyes of his companion the gloriously beautiful woman, seeming alive, so filled with a breathing presence did she appear.

An almost audible gasp escaped the lips of the

lawyer as he gazed upon the creation, noting the unmistakable genius displayed thereon, while the words "womanly intuitiveness" came to his consciousness, as in answer to his wonderment.

Man of the world as he was, he realized that back of the genius which had placed such a creation before him lay a character far removed from the one of the woman whose presence the mountain girl had so wonderfully portrayed.

Turning to Joe, with eyes that positively shone, the criminal lawyer exclaimed,

"So this radiant being was made to live by my little mascot, and to help win her brother's case. I pray God that in some way it may be accomplished."

Another long look he took, noting the fair flesh, the shapeliness of the slender figure, as well as the subtle beauty with which it had been arrayed in its priceless garb of shimmering fabric and lace, while gleams of scarlet seemed positively to radiate from the gems which encircled the full throat; the face, while not Nina Wentworth's, was of the type of woman which she represented: worldly, ambitious, and, as he now felt forced to admit, heartless, for had he not noted the expression of determination which had flitted then lingered on her mobile face during the most trying moments of a youth's career; determination to win her cause and seemingly bent on the lad being punished, whether her gems were regained or not by so doing.

Turning to his companion, whose thoughts were

keeping him company, Allyn Prentice assured him that the painting should indeed find a purchaser. Then bidding him come with him, they left the luxuriant apartment and were hurriedly driven to the court-house.

CHAPTER XXXVII

Back to the court-room, back to fight for the royal lad, seemingly now nearer and dearer to him than before, the honorable criminal lawyer went. Not only had he the accused one to free, but as well he must bring peace and cheer to a far distant one, who was waiting with such patience for the absent.

Joe was given a seat where he could see his friend with little fear of himself being seen, thereby causing needless emotion. The case was soon called, Allyn Prentice barely having time to whisper into Windy's ear that he had learned much since he had been away and was to use it for his case, adding, "No surprise must you show at anything I have to say."

Again the lawyers, the accuser and accused were being probed. To Allyn Prentice it seemed as if gleams of scarlet emanated from the presence of the woman who duly took her stand, so vividly could he see the painted rubies encircling the white throat of the being who had been created because of her accusation and by the very girl who had worn at the time a talisman of his own. What wonder then at his eloquence, for did not the eyes of the girl, Roma, entreat him?

To Windy, as to Nina Wentworth, his mentioning of a cousin, a fellow of unprincipled character, whose existence had only at this hour been made known to him, came as a bolt from a clear sky. A pallor most noticeable spread over the features of the beautiful woman as her glance seemed caught and held by the lawyer who was so valiantly defending the one she had accused; while to her came the wonderment of how much he had learned relative to the lad and his attractive sister.

As for Windy, he dared not think, fearing that disgrace for that Sis might be but the outcome in publicly bringing new facts to light in order to set him free; but as the Prince had bade him make no outward show, he must and would do his utmost to obey. With every nerve strained to its highest tension, Joe looked at the scene before him, feeling it almost providential that he should have arrived to hear for himself the outcome of the cursed accusation. How he longed to go to that old pal and assure him that the right must in the end prevail and that the mountains at least were as true now as when he had left their grandeur! How he admired the man who stood there fighting with an eloquence even the uneducated mountain lad knew it to be, and for one who had no special claim on him! Ah, was it indeed as Joe thought? Could he have known of the almost adoration for the girl — which had seemed to possess Allyn Prentice from the moment he had realized the suspense and sorrow of her who had been to him almost as a

companion, her presence seemingly imbued with life and cheer as she had daily seemed to share his life — would the one who had been denied the right to call her his, have experienced the same regard? Even so, Joe would have been just, for he was indeed one of God's true gentlemen.

Now, as he continued to watch, eager to hear all that was spoken, he recognized a slight confusion on the platform. The lawyers had ceased to speak and were conferring with a person who had come abruptly on the scene. Several moments passed, no word being spoken, then the Judge called for attention, stating that a very unusual circumstance had occurred which would necessitate the dismissal of the accused for a brief period, as he had been sent for at the urgent request of a man who lay at the point of death and which might be the means of clearing up the charge for which he was being tried. He was to be accompanied by the Hon. Allyn Prentice, who would vouch for his reappearance.

The Judge had barely finished when Windy, to whom Allyn Prentice had been speaking, arose and, accompanying the latter, left the room. Once outside, they were driven with great speed to the Emergency Hospital where a man had just been conveyed in a most critical condition. He was a stranger in the city, having arrived by an Eastern train, and had been noted as being in a pronounced state of inebriation and had finally attempted stepping off before the train had pulled into the

station, thereby receiving a heavy fall which had resulted in a fractured skull. Upon reaching the hospital, which he had accomplished in a conscious state, he had earnestly begged for one Albert Anderson to be brought to him, after having been told that if he had any friends they best be sent for, as he was in a most dangerous condition.

Losing no time, the Hon. Allyn Prentice and his young charge were conducted into a small room where on a bed lay a stalwart body, none other than Cousin Ben. Windy, who had been told the person's name, was prepared to see one whom he believed to be his kith, but he was wholly unprepared for the great, bloated-looking creature whom he could hardly believe to be the same being he had left at the Snuggy when he had sought to visit the world a few short months before.

It was very apparent that alcoholic drink had been a constant companion of the now doomed man who lay so helpless upon his death-bed.

At a motion from the one standing at the bedside Windy approached, to be recognized by the being thereon.

"I say, hello, Anderson, ain't you surprised to see me? The fact is it was to see you that I came to this accursed place. If I had kept away I should not now be stretched out like a cur." Here his labored breathing caused him to cease speaking.

"I am very sorry, Ben, to find you like this. How did it happen?" Windy answered, a great

wave of pity filling his heart for the other's physical suffering.

"They did let you leave your place in the dock to come to a dying man, eh?" the labored tones continued. "Well, it was perhaps just as well for your peace of mind that they did, for, Windy, now that it is most probable I shall have to make my peace with the Great Spirit, shall I find one, it may make it a jot easier for me if I unburden my conscience to you."

At the mention of his disgrace, Windy felt a tinge of color creep into his face, while a wonderment as to how his kin knew so minutely relative to his actions brought a question to his lips, but ere he could frame it Ben had again begun speaking:

"I guess the old saying is true that 'It's an ill wind that blows nobody good,' for by my being knocked out, it will benefit you mightily."

"Ben, of what are you speaking? What can you know of my life of late?" rejoined the lad, standing there so quietly, although his heart was beating as though to burst from its bounds.

"Just this,"—here the almost loathsome figure tried to raise himself, but with a deep groan abandoned his project as beyond his power to perform, while a deepened look of despair settled over his face,—“that my death-blow has made you a free man; free to again join the ones waiting you at the Snuggy, free to snap your fingers in the faces

of those who have been determined to disgrace you — I, the keenest of all for it.”

A low, reverent “Thank God!” burst from the lips of the eagerly listening one, as with great impetuosity he begged the doomed man to tell him all.

It was a story of revenge, added to one of deepest intrigue; but now not only had it exonerated the one listening, who with fervent gratitude thanked his heavenly Father, but proved with absolute certainty the honesty of his adored and respected father; while the news that Ben was of no blood relation, only an adopted lad to the very one he had sworn his dear father had wronged, was a bit of information dearer to the heart of the lad than his own freedom or a priceless legacy could ever have been.

Hating work and finding among his adopted father's papers a release from it, if he succeeded in managing it skillfully, Ben had used, after the death of the man who had succored him, a dishonest power to gain for himself a life of ease and idleness. With labored breathing, the confession was continued, Windy holding several times a glass of cooling water to the lips of the humbled man.

As the last part of Ben's confession progressed, it was plain to be seen that he was growing rapidly weaker, while into the eyes of the lad watching him a wistfulness pathetic to see was stealing, and at the words, “I say, Anderson, you had better get some one here to vouch for the rest of my story,”

it was with subdued but positive joy that Windy called to the Prince, who had been waiting with keen impatience for the summons.

Back to the court-room the Hon. Allyn Prentice hastened, a paper in his possession, seeming to him almost as dear as if it had been his own reprieve; a paper signed by the now almost lifeless hands of a fated man. Ben had stated that slumbering anger caused by the attack Windy had made on him had been the means of his hiring one to spy his every action, he even keeping in touch with his accomplice until the time had come to clinch Windy; the securing of Miss Wentworth's gems being the ultimatum; the very place where the gems were concealed being made known, for they had been brought to him by the one whom he had paid to consummate the deed.

Much as he wished to have the freed lad accompany him back where the glory of it all should envelop him, Allyn Prentice felt that a pair of gray eyes would have willed it even as did the brother, who had begged to be allowed to remain with the injured man until the end.

To all, save one, in that court-room waiting the result of such an unprecedented interruption, the news came with great joy — joy for the freedom to a youth — joy that no crime marred the life of one to whom all should seem fair and true as one beginning life's walk. The tones of the criminal lawyer's voice sounded like a clarion call as he finished, having pronounced the lad Andrews free.

From the moment when the messenger had appeared hastening the prisoner, together with the Hon. Allyn Prentice, from the court-room until the reappearance of one to whom all others seemed inferior, had Nina Wentworth evinced no interest in her surroundings; but now as the words ringing seemingly to her, as indeed they really did, with marked exultation, a bitterness amounting to almost physical pain, swept down upon the jealous woman. She still continued to wonder how much he had learned; and not even when he had crossed over to her to congratulate her that soon again would gleams of scarlet encircle her fair throat, did he in any way intimate further knowledge as to the lad's identity.

In his great secret joy at the glad message which would soon be speeding its way over the wire to a waiting one, he accepted the beautiful woman's invitation to drive him to his apartment; but when on arriving he tactfully but deliberately refrained from inviting her to his presence, she realized that as yet her victory had not been won.

Once inside, he awaited with eager anticipation the return of the lads, as he had sent Joe to his young client, thinking that, when the end which would soon come that bound the wounded man to earth life, the lad who had volunteered so unselfishly to remain by his side would be repaid by the renewed companionship of his stanch friend.

What a brave lad his young charge had proven himself to be, and to think of his daily viewing the

pictured face of the one he so loved and without sign, guarding her as with his life! Seeking the depths of his accustomed chair, Allyn Prentice let his fancy run riot. It led him to the height of a pine-girted, mountain trail, to a sweet girlish face where joy and love looked forth from clear eyes of gray. Pausing, still pausing, his thoughts remained with that distant one, seeming to hear endearing words, words she would soon lavish upon the lad he would feign part from, for a deep tenderness enveloped him from his affection.

Suddenly a troubled look deepened the expression which had seemed so placid as the man had given his fancy full sway. Now another face and that of the stalwart Joe had seemed to pass before his vision of the girl, claiming by the very ardor of his glance the right to dream of her. Somehow a gloom unnoticed before stole over the waiting man, and with a motion of impatience he rose and crossing to the open window, he leaned far out, inhaling the perfumed air of the coming night.

At a distant part of the flowered city a youth, with unmistakable signs of grief depicted on his countenance, had just left the presence of death; his hand still seeming to clasp fingers which had ceased to respond to his pressure, for Ben was no more. With his last breath he had thanked the youth for his kindness in remaining, adding, "Windy, old man, it will make it a jot easier for me to grope my way."

During the last hour of his life Ben had not only

related his behavior to Roma, begging her brother convey his sorrow at having caused her grief, but also helped to bring the true nature of big, generous-hearted Joe's love for the girl before him. With thoughts perturbed, Windy entered an ante-room, thinking to collect himself ere making necessary arrangements for the burial of the deceased.

In an instant his hands were bound by warm, outstretched ones, while the endearing eyes of his old friend enveloped him, so wholly did they hold him.

"It is a little world after all," Windy remarked some time later, when Joe and himself had related their doings one to the other. "To think that Ben, you and I should be under one roof and so far from the Snuggy. Poor old Ben! I can well afford to forgive him, for has he not now given me a freed life?"

Leaving Joe reluctantly, Windy hastened to attend to all in his power, as a last fitting memorial for one he had long believed to be his kin.

Again back with Joe, the lad, who was free to act for himself, now longed for the presence of the Prince, and by his title of him expressed as much to his boyhood friend. Of his princely dealings with him Windy glowingly talked, as in the perfumed gloaming they were conveyed back to his presence.

Long into the night a subdued light burned in Allyn Prentice's apartment, where three types of manhood were engrossed each with the other, the

soft night breeze wafting the perfume equally to all from the fragrant blossoms which stood guard over the pictured being of one whose presence filled all thoughts. A message long hours before had been sent to her, stating, "Windy free — will write," signed Joe.

Of his life and keen suffering since the arriving of Ben at the Snuggy, Windy freely spoke; his great fear having been that his beloved Sis should ever learn of the supposed disgrace of their revered father.

With quiet tact the man of the world, the keen criminal lawyer, first listened, then with adroitness led the lads to reveal, as it were, their habits, their haunts, their very lives, lived amid the pines; an eagerness in him seeming paramount at the mingling of the girl Roma's life to theirs; while to the brother an unusual tender cadence came into his tones as he now and again referred to her incentive to work for him in aiding to free him, which had resulted in the producing of a being of Miss Wentworth's world.

When at last, and long after the crescent of the moon had set in the azure west and the friends had separated for their rest, Allyn Prentice sat alone, there echoed in his heart the words his young client had voiced when looking again at his Sis's creation,

"Thank God, my Sis does not belong to a world like theirs."

CHAPTER XXXVIII

Midsummer in the mountains — could any words imply more? Back to the sylvan retreat, Windy accompanied by Joe, had been restored. Back to a heart filled with gratitude to her Creator, while now again day by day Roma reveled in ministering to the every want of her boys.

To Windy, the parting from the Prince had been very hard, while if fervency in a handclasp could denote sorrow on the part of the man, who had so generously befriended him, it had assuredly been given to the lad, as had also a promise to join him in the mountains ere the summer had spent itself.

To Joe had also been given a hearty handclasp, accompanied by the assurance that he had enjoyed meeting him, and that they would renew the acquaintance at a further date; also a letter was entrusted to him to give the artist who had executed with skill to aid his client.

Such a homecoming as it had proved to the lads, as well as to the aged artist, whom all felt to be one of them! The summer days simply began and ended with a charm they could well understand so content were they to live and enjoy, beholding the calm sweet radiance which fell on them from gray

eyes, and which so gratified all their desires. Soon the lads were busily engaged in their customary summer pursuits, the ponies, as well as they, seeming glad to give pleasure to the world-weary, as they enabled them to commune with nature in its wondrousness.

Roma, as well, was often in the saddle, coming back to the Snuggy with many trophies of the fullness of the season, to show the grand old master of nature. Now, it would be straight, hardy stalks of columbine, as delicate in color as the soft down of the canary; then again, painted cups, attired in a medley of tints from palest pink to deepest crimson. While often as the wind, with gentle caress, swayed the tinted boughs over the carpet of purple heather, scarlet gleams would flash forth as the lithe figure of the happy girl showed through the aperture — her beloved colored adornment accompanying her.

The details of Ben's death, Windy had told her on his return, as well as the forgiveness he had expressed that she grant him. Very sad it had seemed to the girl to think of one so seemingly unprincipled to die with such short respite, but he had done much to expiate, and for that she was deeply grateful. Of Ben, they often spoke, but it was the other, the Prince, as her Broth called him, who provided the greater theme for conversation, at least where Windy was concerned.

Again and again his Sis would creep to his side to ask of this Prince, until she felt that but to

follow with her Broth's eyes was to know him. Many times and oft she would find herself lost in deep thought, rousing herself to find it was of this Prince she was thinking, the Prince in whose luxuriant home her Broth had been given a place of refuge, and who had written her, complimenting her highly on her art, also enclosing a good-sized check for its creation.

Then again it would seem that this Nina with her cruelly beautiful eyes her Broth often spoke of, held her thoughts. At such times an unrest seemed to possess her and she would strive to put her from her, going back with a deeper ardor of appreciation to the man who had so princely befriended her Broth.

And now, he was coming — coming up the trail, to fulfill his promise to the lad he had so valiantly fought for, in spite of darkest proofs as to his honesty. It was little wonder that the lad, as he finished the contents of the Prince's letter, should blaze forth with a great joy. As for the girl herself, as she watched the glad light that leaped into her Broth's eyes, there came an overwhelming sensation of mingled joy and awe at beholding this Prince.

Several mornings after the arriving of the letter which had brought the certainty that the Snuggy and its inmates would receive a visit from one whom the world considered a distinguished man, Roma arose with a sense of great joy in her heart. Perhaps it was because her dear Dr. Moulton was

again an inmate of the same hemisphere as herself, also that she rejoiced at the glad truth which had come from the sorrow her protégée had borne when she had so sorely needed her. She had also added that she should most certainly pay her a visit ere the leaves made a Persian carpet over the mossy verdure.

Hastily dressing herself in her habitual costume, Roma was soon busily engaged in preparing breakfast for her cronies, as she sometimes laughingly called them. Every glimpse she caught of the world of nature outside seemed to beckon alluringly to her, while in her heart she made answer by declaring she would soon be out in the open to breathe, to behold, to enjoy.

Their distinguished guest was not expected for several days, so that the young housekeeper felt she might be allowed a bit of respite. Thinking to enjoy the freedom of the woods, also to benefit by nature in her loveliest, the happy girl armed herself with sketch book and crayons and turned her back for a bit upon the restfulness of the Snuggly.

As she wandered aimlessly along, the distant rush of the wild, glacier-fed cataracts reached her ear like a symphonic poem, while the pungent breath from the spruce and balsam entered her being like nectar that had no equal. For a time she roamed about so filled with the beauty of nature as not to wish to take her gaze from such wealth of it as she was beholding.

Suddenly she conceived a fancy to visit the lake whose waters sought and held all nature's loveliest tints. As a child she had wondered at the extreme beauty of its iridescent, gold-tipped surface. Now it seemed to her as a place set apart by God at which to worship Him in the beauty of holiness. To-day her heart seemed filled to overflowing. Her Broth was free, her dear professor and Joe seemed happy, her adored benefactress had promised to come to her, and now in a few days she should meet face to face the one who had indeed acted princely to her beloved Broth. Yes, she would go down the trail to nature's shrine, and there lift her gratitude to the Giver of all.

Secreting her folio and artist materials in the hollow of an old tree, Roma, with a purpose before her, began her descent. Many thoughts crowded themselves into her aroused consciousness as she plied with nimbleness the mountain trail. Once as the white fleecy clouds, which seemed to float so lazily to and fro, like huge birds, parted, showing the soft almost turquoise blue of the sky, the thought of the gemlike eyes of the woman who lived in the flower-scented land came before her. Of one thing she was grateful; grateful to Ben, not only for liberating her Broth, but for restoring the flashing jewels to the woman whose beauty they enhanced. Here, almost involuntarily, her hand wandered to the slender chain from which hung her own scarlet gleams, while a soft smile

circled her mobile mouth as she realized her love for it.

On she hastened, stooping now for a distant view through some aperture, now to gather some spray of mountain flowers, her own face the embodiment of flower-like grace. The last turn had come into view, which, when reached, then passed, would bring into vision the placid lake beneath the sheltering wing of the sun-kissed glacier. Singing aloud from very joy, Roma hurried along, to find at the turn her eyes held by a wanderer, a stranger.

A long look came to her from the eyes of this stranger, a look which seemed to envelop her in its possession, while with utmost courtesy a head was bared, as to her ears was borne the word "Roma." For a second she stood mute before him, then upon the fragrant air resounded, "The Prince," the while she found her hand encased in one of the wanderer's, who stood before her.

As the realization of the term she had applied to the now smiling personage came over her, a wave of color suffused her face, though adroitly her companion had feigned not to notice it. To the man, allowing his eyes to feast upon the girlish loveliness, it seemed as if a spirit, a being almost of another realm, stood before him. Her costume was much the same as had enveloped her in his pictured possession of her; her features, her eyes, all were the same; but here was the living, breathing, soulful Roma — a being one among many.

Many questions and answers followed the unexpected meeting; the Hon. Allyn Prentice telling the girl that he had been able to leave a few days sooner than he had thought. She explaining that a call had seemed to come to her, urging her down the trail, to — here her companion almost reverently exclaimed, "To guide me."

"Yes, to guide you, if you wish it; for, Mr. Prentice, I feel that I can never repay you for your great goodness to my Broth." Here another tinge of color crept to her soft cheeks, as she added, "And for your princely aid."

Learning that the girl had really started to view the opal-like lake, he asked that she continue her trip, only allowing him to accompany her. To which she consented with pleased impetuosity, while to her repeated anxiety as to his ability at mountain climbing, he assured her that nothing he could do would bring him keener enjoyment, for that had always been one of his favorite pastimes.

The visit to the shrine was to Roma, in spite of the companionship of her newly found acquaintance, one of almost reverence, for she had not visited it before since her Broth had been pronounced free — free to enjoy all the world holds most dear to the young. Now, as never before, she seemed to feel the great charitableness which the man by her side had bestowed on her beloved, while a feeling almost of adoration seemed to leap from her heart to him, as well as to the Creator of them both.

A very silent Roma followed for a little time, but soon the very buoyancy of her happiness made her like a gladsome lark, almost singing in her ecstasy. The climb up the home pass was one of enjoyment to both, many an anecdote being told by the keen, criminal lawyer with the abandonment of youth, while the merry laugh from the lips of the guide, as Roma insisted on being, floated back down the mountain trail and was lost in the shadows of the lengthening day.

Great was the surprise of Windy and Joe when, returning at the close of day, they found the Prince already a member of the Snuggy, the professor and Roma each seeming to vie with each other for his comfort and companionship, while, as Windy expressed it later, the Prince seemed to be enjoying himself in a most approved fashion.

CHAPTER XXXIX

As the halcyon summer days swiftly passed, the distinguished guest at the Snuggly often thought of the words the sister of his boyhood chum had spoken — words telling of such loyal, true love as the inmates of a mountainous home had one for the other. He did not need to seek this peaceful home to realize the truth of her words, for from the advent of big, pioneer-like Joe a revelation had been borne to him that included the lad as well as the brother, in the love which surrounded the girl. Just what Joe's words to the pictured Roma, implied to the living Roma, the Hon. Allyn Prentice felt he did not know. He only knew it had seemed to bring a sense of separation to him from his girl mascot, a separation which merely in thought brought a sensation of deep loss.

As the days had followed one another after his parting with the lads, who had left for their home in the pines, a feeling of unrest, of uneasiness, seemed often to possess him. At such times he would end by looking long into the truthful, frank eyes of the pictured Roma, wishing thereby to solve all; but the silent face gave him back no answer as to the right of words of endearment.

As days passed into weeks, his unrest seemed to

deepen rather than to disappear, nor could even the subtle, charming grace of the fair Nina wholly dispel it. Once again he had been bidden to her home to a fête of social distinction. Once again, as in duty bound, had he sent his floral token to the beautiful woman; his congratulations relative to the restoring of the gems which flashed their gleams of scarlet, bringing far more the flush to her cheeks and the deepened light to her eyes than his graciously worded compliment of the beauty of the throat whereon rested the brilliant jewels.

With adroitness she sought to gain information of the girl, excluding the mentioning of her name in the inquiry of the freed lad and his life since the return to his home. With as subtle adroitness Allyn Prentice also evaded all mention of the girl, whose presence seemed to bear to him a silent call. In fact, he had promised himself a journey; a journey to the mountain home where he should meet and know this girl of the Snuggy.

The day following the evening of the social gathering at Nina Wentworth's artistic home was the day he had set apart to fulfill what to him was now a keenly desired wish, but no word of it did he as much as breathe, even when bidding his hostess a pleasant good night.

After the first look into the eyes of the living, breathing Roma, Allyn Prentice realized that the silent, urging call which had seemed to consume him by its very entirety had been the call of love,

love for the youth, beauty and goodness of the real girl Roma. But of Joe — the loyal pal of Roma's brother — what of him? Of that he should see. If any one should have told the Hon. Allyn Prentice, as he followed with steps, as well as eyes, the lithe figure of his guide up the mountains, that a feeling of cowardice predominated his consciousness, he would have disbelieved it; nevertheless, as the Snuggy came into view he found himself watching, with an alertness he had not shown, until near where his expectant meeting with the lads should show him Joe and the girl Roma.

No criminal on the stand, no accused one it was his duty to free, did he watch with keener subtlety than the glances which passed between the girl he now knew he loved and the stalwart lad of the woods. With what gratitude did he recognize that the heart of her who unconsciously wore his talisman and honored his gift was free — free for him to win if by his love for her he could receive hers. That Joe, indeed, loved her hopelessly, he also discerned; had it been otherwise, he should not have extended his visit from day to day until now more than two weeks had passed since he had become an inmate of the pine-girted Snuggy.

Of his love for Roma he had not as yet spoken; each day, feelings akin to those he had experienced before he had assured himself that Joe's love was not returned by the sweet mountain girl now causing him to defer his own verdict from day to day. He felt that she enjoyed his society, and now and

again as their eyes met he fancied a soft, tender light for a moment rose in their depths, only soon to become hidden from his view. That he longed to bring its radiance to beam for himself alone, he realized more and more, as he spent the golden hours with her.

How true, how pure and modest she was, and yet, with all her gentleness, how brave and loyal was the heart for those she loved! To see her with her aged artist friend, as well as with her boys, Broth and Joe, was to see a wealth of love displayed unsparingly.

Her pleasure in the saddle and her fine mount found appreciation from her guest, and together they had enjoyed many a climb through the pine-girted avenues to the feet of the sun-kissed glaciers.

They had now just returned from one of those jaunts and were seated upon the low veranda, their horses grazing before the Snuggly door. Soon they were joined by the aged artist, who had been declaring for some days his intended departure. Now as they sat watching the great crimson glow sink lower and lower between the vistas, a quietness seemed to permeate their separate beings. At last the silence was broken by Roma, a little sigh sounding audibly upon the scented air.

"It will be lonely when my friends have departed; how I wish—" and here a tinge of carmine came unbidden, to vie with her ever-present, scarlet adornment.

"Wish what, my little artist?" exclaimed her

aged teacher, for he had also been studying the girl since the appearing of the Prince and was now wondering on what her wish would depend.

"Just that all one's friends might not have to be separated — one going to a land of flowers, another to an Eastern port, and some to remain in a clime where the winter yearns to hasten and is loath to leave," returned the girl, a sadness for the moment seeming to hide the real Roma from their view. An instant later she seemed about to add more, when, hurriedly rising, she entered the Snuggy and soon the two she had left heard her light step as she hastened to prepare the evening meal for them all.

To Allyn Prentice, as he still lingered in the fragrant air, came a wish which echoed Roma's — a wish that he might never have to become separated from the noble girl; and he determined that ere another night should be ushered over the mountain-crowned land, he should know if such a realization could indeed be his.

When parting from his young client and Joe, he had asked them that they speak no word of his mascot's picture occupying a place in his home. "Not but that I wish her to know," he had added, "but there is a little story associated with it which I would like her to hear; so, if you do not mind, I will tell it to her when I pay your Snuggy a visit."

The time for the picture and the story had come. To-morrow he would ask the girl he loved to go to the iridescent lake, to the spot of nature she called

God's shrine, and there he would ask her to bless his life with the priceless gift of her pure love.

The down trail had been accomplished with little incident, both Roma and her companion seeming now and again lost in reverie; then again filled with almost unnatural gayety as they called back and forth to each other, while their ponies skillfully piloted on. Summer's nature was wooing all to itself, the sky, the verdure, the living creatures of the woods — all were being blest by its loved touch.

At the Prince's wish, for such she ever thought of him, Roma had willingly acquiesced that they should again visit the fascinating, jeweled haunt. To her, a charm, which this place of nature breathed, was ever poignant. To-day, to visit it again, and in the companionship of one who in so brief an acquaintance had seemingly enhanced the beauty of all for her, was keenest joy to the mountain girl.

The aged professor had bade them linger, nor to give thought of him, as Roma had with solicitation spoken of his welfare. Perhaps he divined, as when with loyal Joe, so now with the Prince — for so even he often found himself mentally terming their guest — that the time had arrived for him to know his fate.

With what marvelous glory did the tinted, gleaming bosom of the lake welcome the comers, as they sought its seclusion, to enjoy its beauty! The ponies even seemed to feel that an unusual

radiance was about them, as they whinnied one to the other, resting under verdant shelter.

"Roma, what would you say if I should tell you that you had been in my thoughts every day, yes, I believe, every hour for weeks, before I ever saw the real Roma?" Here the Hon. Allyn Prentice's eyes rested with marked admiration upon the face of the girl seated beside him.

They had been watching the sun-kissed ripples, listening to the calls of nature, conversing on many themes previous to the abrupt question.

Now, at his words, a look of almost grieved concern seemed to pass over her mobile features as she quietly answered,

"Yes, Broth's case must have been a trying one, especially as you knew we were all in all to each other; and your concern included me, for which I am deeply grateful."

"No, Roma, I do not refer in any way to the case, as you style it; for not until the day your brother was freed by the truth of Ben's statement, did I even know his rightful name."

A startled look had now crept into the gray eyes of his companion, as she essayed to speak, but the voice of the man at her side continued,

"Yes, Roma, you have been an inmate of my California home now for a long time; your being has been there to bid me welcome. At first, only as an attractive, girlish, pictured being, but at the last seeming a living, loving, regal woman."

With thoughtful tenderness he then told her all; of the photograph coming to him as it did, of his life, his work, of the loyalty of her brother regarding her picture; of all, even to his friendship with the beautiful woman of the world, the fair Nina. During the entire period in which Allyn Prentice had spoken the truth concerning his life and the interest he had felt for the girl he had called his mascot, she had gazed at him, seemingly lost in his vivid relating. At times, a look of perplexity deepened her brow.

Now, like a messenger, came the certainty who had sent her — here her hand reached and lovingly caressed the gleaming cross which rested at her soft full throat, a tinge of vivid scarlet creeping into her face, meanwhile; but before she could speak, a hand was placed over hers that pressed the bauble and her name was again spoken, oh, so tenderly.

At some little time later, when Roma had really been brought to realize that the Prince loved her and wished as she had, only one little day before, that there should never be any separation for — friends — for them — she then realized that much as she loved her aged friend, it had really been the thought of parting from him whose warm clasp now held her to him as she put her thoughts in words. Again and again the eager man asked her of the finding of the talisman both had worn and loved, seeming to see the little illumined face in the radiantly happy one of the girl by his side, as

she related her joy at possessing it, and who now had promised to always wear his initials, those of A.E.P.

Happiness crowned them both as they lingered by the placid lake; wonderment of it all resting like a halo over the gentle girl, who felt that a gift from above had been given her in the love of this prince of men. In her joy, she grieved that big faithful Joe should have had cause to suffer and by her, and with tender sympathy she spoke of him to her beloved, only to be assured that he had studied them both ere he had dared to hope; pitying Joe, but thanking God that she had been heart free.

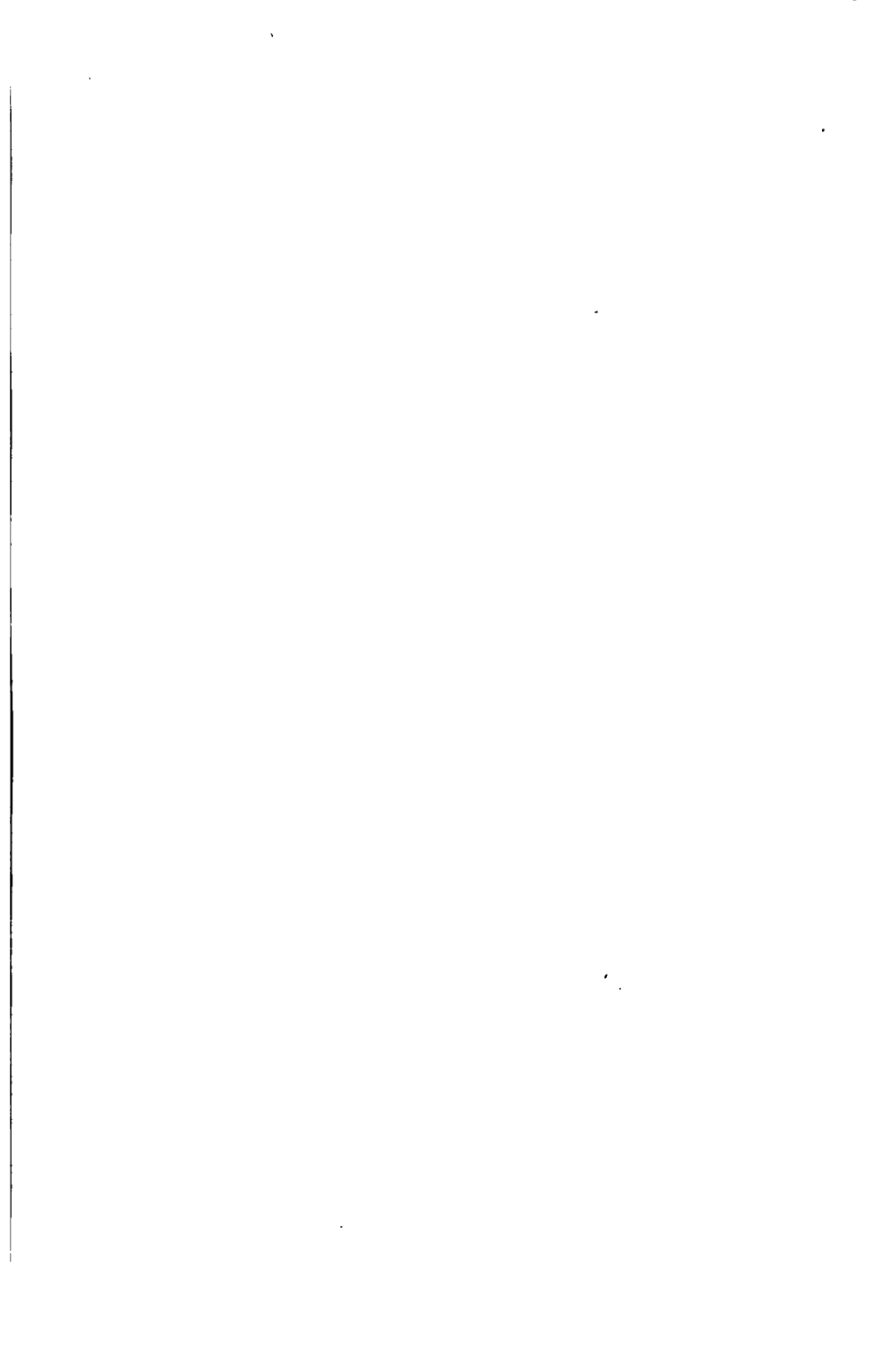
The ponies had long been restless, while the crimson gleams of the fire ball had sunk lower and lower from the pine-girted Snuggy, until now it reached the crimson waters of the lake, bidding a man and maiden take up life's duties again, to go forth blessed by their love; glad, whether for joy or sorrow, to be of comfort each to the other.

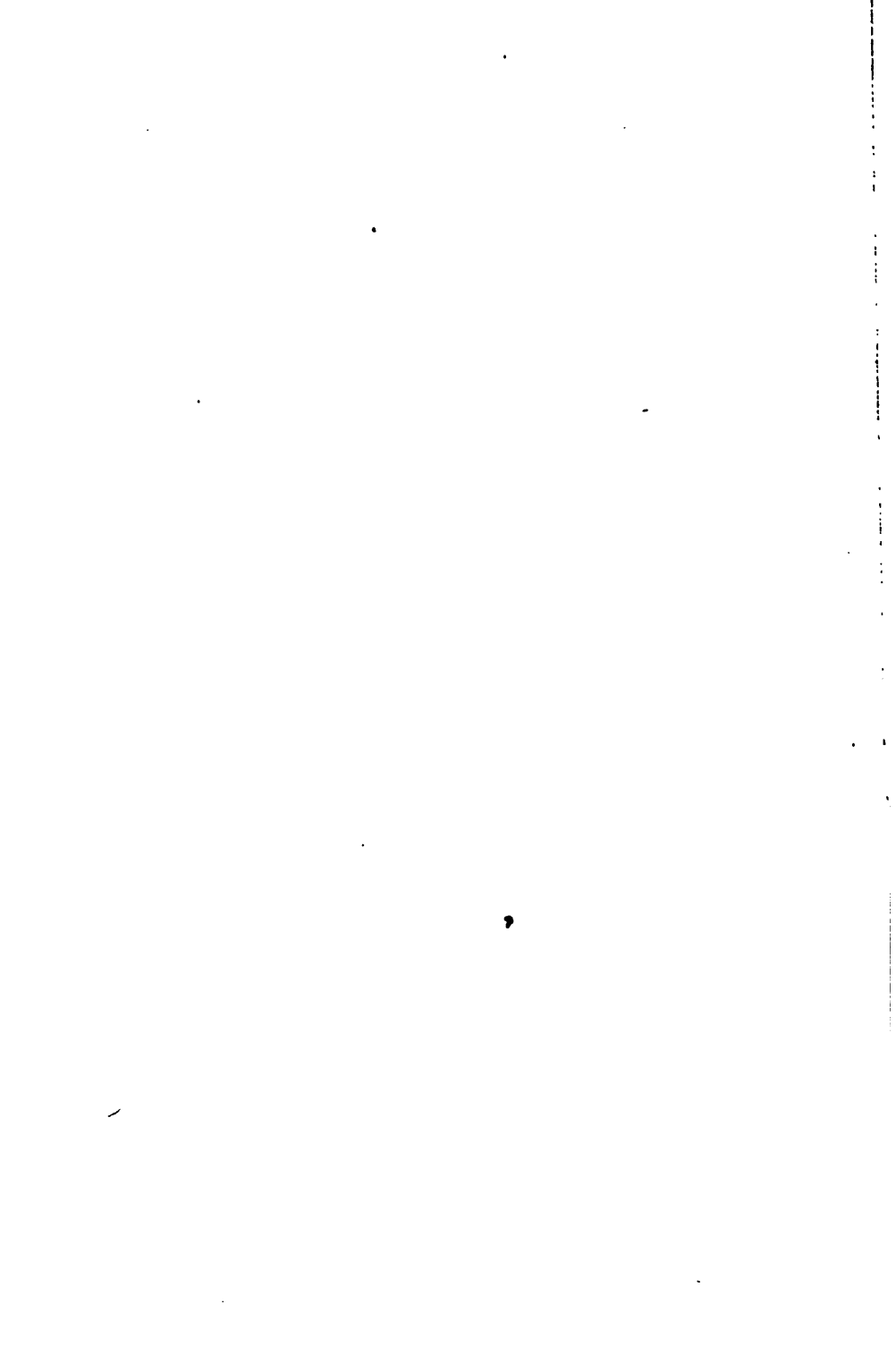
Now to a land of flowers, to a home made lovely for her, its richest gift being the one of a husband's love, Roma had been borne; the best wishes of many friends following the two who only needed those heartfelt expressions to complete their perfect happiness; both Roma and her husband assuring all their dear ones that open house would always be for them, whenever they would deign to occupy it.

Their lives had been united at the Snuggy, the

impatient man asking that his wife-to-be should speed the furlough, when with reluctance he bade her good-by, to return to his duties at court.

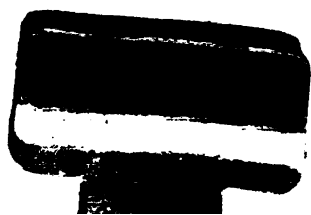
With loving consideration she had complied, and when the golden summer days at the mountains began to show traces that their glory would soon be spent, Roma, surrounded by those she loved, gave herself not to the Prince, as she lovingly told her dear Broth, but to "My Prince."







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